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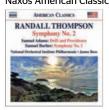


# GRAMOPHONE **SOUNDS OF AMERICA**

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

### S Adams · Barber · Thompson

S Adams Drift and Providence<sup>a</sup> Barber Symphony No 1, Op 9 **Thompson** Symphony No 2 National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic / James Ross with aSamuel Adams elecs Naxos American Classics M 8 559822 (70' • DDD)



This is the second recording by the National Orchestral Institute

Philharmonic, a summer training programme for conservatory students. It's as impressive as its predecessor in terms of the quality of orchestral execution, and perhaps even more valuable in its choice of repertoire.

Randall Thompson's Symphony No 2 (1931) is woefully neglected both on record and in the concert hall. James Ross captures the music's playful verve without neglecting its powerful lyrical undercurrent, and if there's not quite that marvellous sense of authority and élan one hears in Bernstein's classic 1968 account (Sony), it's still eminently satisfying. I actually prefer Ross's unfussy yet always affectionate phrasing in the Largo - lyrically lovely music that seems to marry Rimsky-Korsakov and Richard Rodgers.

Barber's First Symphony (1936) is somewhat less of a rarity but even here Ross and his young musicians hold their own. Listen, for example, to the ardent, imploringly communicative string-playing beginning at 4'50" in the opening section or to the rapturously mesmeric oboe solo in the Andante tranquillo. Never mind that violins occasionally show a hint of strain in alt; this is a performance that grabs you and won't let go.

I'm not convinced Samuel Adams's Drift and Providence (2012) - for orchestra and real-time, digitally filtered percussion is heard to best effect alongside the brilliant concision of Barber's symphony. The young American composer clearly has the ability to create and sustain atmosphere, and there are some memorably thrilling

### GRAMOPHONE talks to ...

### Martin Perry

The intrepid pianist discusses Hindemith and exploring modern pianistic rarities

### What first attracted you to Hindemith's Ludus tonalis?

Undoubtedly the summit of his piano-writing, Hindemith's Ludus tonalis is a compelling blend of searing lyricism and flawless counterpoint. To me, every moment of its 50-plus minutes seems spontaneous and inspired, and his always-changing palette allows for tremendous personal expression.

### To what extent is this work a 20th-century equivalent of Bach's Art of Fugue?

In his CD liner notes, Allan Kozinn describes Ludus tonalis as 'a sublime working out of musical principles' and in that larger sense it certainly belongs in the same company as The Art of Fugue. It also contains echoes of Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier in its specific procession of keys, its pairings of fugal and non-fugal writing and, unlike The Art of Fugue, its decidedly keyboard compositional style.



### It's an unusual coupling; can you tell us something about Hugo Weisgall's Sonata?

In my three collaborations with Bridge Records and producer Bob Ludwig I've wanted to complement established masterpieces, such as Ives's Concord Sonata and Elliott Carter's Piano Sonata, with little-known works from the mid- to late 20th century. Weisgall's Piano Sonata from 1982 is post-tonal, verging on serial, but seethes with heartfelt expression and drama. It's a visceral and exciting work that deserves to be heard more often.

### What are your future plans?

To continue mining the repertoire for hidden 20th-century gems. Suggestions welcome!

moments. Inspired by recorded sounds of the Pacific Ocean, the music does indeed project a enveloping sense of undulating vastness. At 2'30" in the central 'Divisadero' section, for instance, deep notes seem to rise, lurking, from profound darkness. At times, however, there seems to be a surfeit of orchestral activity without sufficient incident. On the other hand, this may be exactly the effect Adams had in mind.

Andrew Farach-Colton

### Debussy

Études, Books 1 & 2 Paulina Zamora pf Delos (F) DE3530 (49' • DDD)



Among the many composers who have cultivated the piano étude, ranging from

Steibelt, Clementi, Hummel, Cramer and Czerny to Ligeti, Glass and Bolcom, few would argue that the summit of the genre belongs to three triumvirs, Chopin, Liszt and Debussy. The fact that, even today, performances and recordings of Debussy's 12 Études from 1915 are relatively scarce makes the appearance of any complete recording a cause for curiosity.

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All-Star Orchestra, Gerard Schwarz

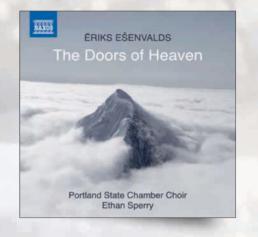
...a skilled and efficient conductor..."

- NEW YORK TIMES

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The National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic and James Ross recording works by Samuel Adams, Samuel Barber and Randall Thompson - see review on page I

The latest is by the Chilean-American pianist Paulina Zamora, who now teaches at the University of Chile in Santiago. A sincere and persuasive musician, Zamora's playing reveals a long and fond relationship with the Études. Pieces such as 'Pour les quartes', 'Pour les huit doigts' and Pour les degrés chromatiques' are suffused with distinctive atmosphere. On the other hand, some lighter-hearted pieces, such as 'Pour les cinq doigts' and 'Pour les notes répétées', seem overly earnest.

At the soft end of the spectrum, Zamora's dynamic palette could be more differentiated and, perhaps, add another degree of quiet to convey Debussy's occasional *ppp*. As it is, in sudden changes between very loud and very soft, as in 'Pour les sonorités opposées', contrast seems insufficient. Though details of the specific circumstances of the recording were not available to me, it seems plausible that distant microphone placement may have played a role in obscuring details.

Unfortunately, sound reproduction makes this disc less than competitive with those of Mitsuko Uchida (Philips, 7/90), Jean-Efflam Bavouzet (Chandos, 12/08), Mariangela Vacatello (Brilliant Classics, 2012) and Garrick Ohlsson (Hyperion, 8/15), all of which, in their very different ways, provide compelling realisations of

this intriguing music, Debussy's valediction to the piano. Patrick Rucker

### Garland

The Birthday Party. Blessingway. Amulet (After Roberto Bolaño) **Aki Takahashi** pf New World ® 80788-2 (64' • DDD)



Subtlety is the pervasive quality that pianist Aki Takahashi conveys so luminously

on this disc of works by Peter Garland. The music often doesn't raise its voice much above a whisper, and even when it does, the narratives are skilfully crafted to maintain a certain expressive decorum. Garland alters harmonies and structural elements with impressive restraint, heading in directions that surprise and captivate the ear.

Most of the movements in the Garland pieces presented here have a programmatic basis, though it isn't always necessary to know the storyline to appreciate the result. The four movements of *The Birthday Party* unfold in a series of ethereal gestures, with a droll stop along the way to waltz in salute to Erik Satie. Garland adopted the name of a Navajo ceremony for *Blessingway*, whose

two movements – 'night song' and 'day song' – are built principally of chords that emerge in a panoply of colours and harmonic implications.

The sonic palette is stretched in telling ways in *Amulet*, originally composed for four pianos but played on this disc – through the magic of layered recording – by Takahashi. Taking inspiration from the last word in a novel by the Chilean-Mexican author Roberto Bolaño, the seven movements evoke a variety of moods and emotions. Two of the movements are marches; two others celebrate important figures in Garland's life.

In all of these works, Takahashi performs with consummate artistry, blending superior control and tonal lucidity with a cohesive sense of line and motion. Garland's music could hardly be better served. Donald Rosenberg

### Hindemith · Weisgall

Hindemith Ludus tonalis Weisgall Piano Sonata Martin Perry pf

Bridge © BRIDGE9487 (70' • DDD)



Hindemith's 1942 contrapuntal tour de force *Ludus tonalis* turns up less

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# Find your piece

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Classical downloads, streaming and experiences at primephonic.com frequently on disc than certain other largescale piano epics. While the work equals Bach's *Goldberg* or Beethoven's *Diabelli* Variations in terms of intellectual chic, its box-office appeal remains specialised at best. Admittedly, it's not easy for performers to elevate the fugues beyond their seemingly doctrinaire surface, or to enliven the interludes without sounding as if they are trying too hard to do so.

There's no disputing Martin Perry's solid musicianship and scrupulous technical preparation. The pianist's thoughtful phrasing and overall sensitivity serve lyrical movements particularly well. For example, his tender and songful handling of the F major *Fuga tertia*'s rising intervals and rhythmic syncopations make one wonder if Hindemith had heard any of Copland's 1930s ballet scores. In the 19th Interludium, Perry's slow and resolutely steady pacing is a model of concentration and makes its expressive points purely through gradations in dynamics and touch.

Conversely, the march-inspired D major Fuga octava and 13th Interludium, while not quite so animated as they could be, convey appropriate force and swagger. Yet given Perry's feathery, offhand delivery of the scherzando B flat Fuga nona, the seventh Interludium, also marked Scherzando, seems surprisingly matter-offact; likewise the pianist's low-energy Secunda and Quarta Fugues and third Interludium. Although Perry avoids Olli Mustonen's occasional flamboyance and exaggerations in the opening and closing movements (the latter replicates the former in retrograde), the sweeping arpeggios lack the easy flow heard in most other recorded versions.

The disc opens with Hugo Weisgall's charmless, pedantic and utterly anonymous 1982 Piano Sonata. The work may not be strictly 12-tone in structure, yet it qualifies as a 'serial killer'. Perry's committed pianism presents Weisgall's skilful and rigorous manipulation of materials in the most listenable light possible, while annotator Allan Kozinn's booklet essay accurately describes how the three movements unfold. If you're curious about Weisgall, his vocal music is infinitely more vibrant, communicative and emotionally committed.

On the whole, Perry's *Ludus tonalis* mirrors the integrity and sobriety of John McCabe's Hyperion traversal. For me, Mustonen's characterful vivacity rules the roost, although some may prefer Ivo Janssen's comparable yet less quirky conception (out of print on CD, available

via download). Käbi Laretei's incomparable 1965 Philips interpretation has yet to appear on CD, but that's another story.

Jed Distler

Ludus tonalis – selected comparisons: McCabe (5/96<sup>®</sup>) (HYPE) CDH55413 Mustonen (5/96) (DECC) → 444 803-2DH

### Nowakowski

String Quartets<sup>a</sup> - No 1, 'Songs of Forgiveness'; No 2, 'Grandfather Songs' (in memoriam Henryk Górecki). A uśnijże mi, uśnij (Lullaby: O sleep for me, sleep)<sup>a</sup>. Blood, Forgotten<sup>b</sup>

<sup>b</sup>Emily Ondracek-Peterson vn <sup>a</sup>Voxare Quartet Naxos American Classics (M) 8 559821 (56' • DDD)



The intense emotional worlds the music of Mark Nowakowski inhabits pay tribute

to the struggles and enduring spirit of the Polish people. Each of the four works on this disc probes dark corners, allowing us to enter into private worlds in which despair, anger and hope are conveyed in striking terms. The Polish-American composer evokes dramatic and psychological atmospheres as if Bartók and Shostakovich were looking over his shoulder, but with his own sense of urgency, rhythm and colour.

Two string quartets demonstrate Nowakowski's skill at plumbing the depths of feeling. In two movements, String Quartet No 1, Songs of Forgiveness, touches upon despair and death through interweaving lines of unflinching passion. The writing is at once fierce, haunting and mystical. Nowakowski employs audio clips and celebrates a noted Polish composer in the equally riveting String Quartet No 2, Grandfather Songs, in memory of Henryk Górecki.

Although the videos that are part of Blood, Forgotten can't be experienced on this recording, the piece nevertheless makes a gripping impression as performed by violinist Emily Ondracek-Peterson with the electronically engineered violin lines played on an instrument that once resided in a concentration camp. It is followed by the short 'A uśnijże mi, uśnij' ('O sleep for me, sleep'), a traditional lullaby Nowakowski shaped into a song of consoling beauty.

The performances, vivid and articulate, seize the attention. Ondracek-Peterson and her colleagues in the Voxare Quartet are piercingly alert to the expressive needs of Nowakowski's bold and empathetic art.

**Donald Rosenberg** 

### Su Lian Tan

Life in Wayang. Orfeo in Asia. Revelations Bruce Brubaker pf Jupiter Quartet
Arsis (F) CD181 (78' • DDD)



Writing music for friends and colleagues must be one of the greatest joys of the

composer's art. Here it is demonstrated by three absorbing pieces written by Su Lian Tan, who teaches composition at Middlebury College in Vermont.

Life in Wayang, commissioned by the Takács Quartet, is wonderfully dramatic music that reveals its puppet-theatre origins in the skeletal nature of its framework and the quicksilver disconnects between delicacy and passion. The narrative breaks through ghostly landscapes into gorgeous Janáčeklike song, and a spike of energy recalls the Trio of Beethoven's Second 'Rasumovsky' Quartet, ending in a slither of insinuation. It is forcefully played by the Jupiter Quartet, Artists-in-Residence at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, who have a real knack for authentically inhabiting this kind of personally inspired art.

The sheer relish with which Bruce Brubaker swings into Tan's *Orfeo in Asia*, commissioned by Blair McMillen, is a response to the way the composer's beautiful, often clangorously powerful writing for the piano aligns with her conceit on an Orpheus 'spirited away to Southeast Asia' with all the attendant gamelan noise that implies, mixed in with surges of eclectic Western influences.

The CD gets its title from *Revelations*, a two-movement piano quintet commissioned by longtime Middlebury Performing Arts director Paul Nelson for cellist Sophie Shao. The music tries earnestly to 'represent the life of a scholar, a teacher and role model', and can't help being academic in all the most endearing ways; also, as might be expected, it is strewn casually with gorgeous cello solos. **Laurence Vittes** 

### **Trotta**

Seven Last Words (Septem ultima verba)

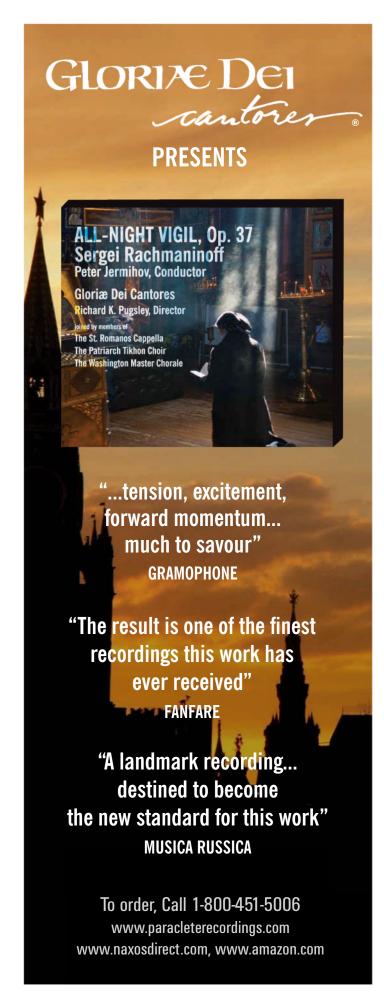
Melanie Russell sop David Farwig bar Kansas City

Repertory Singers and Orchestra / Ben A Spalding

Morning Star (© 7086-2 (42' • DDD)



The booklet tells one precious little about this choral cantata but the composer's website





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### Revelations

Su Lian Tan's assured approach to chamber music is marked in this recording, nimbly performed by the awardwinning Jupiter String Quartet and renowned pianist Bruce Brubaker.

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Felix Hell (third from left) with his production team recording 'Heroic Proportions' for MSR Classics

fills in the gaps. Thus, Seven Last Words by Michael John Trotta (b1978) was completed in 2016 to a co-commission from four churches in Kentucky, Missouri and the Carolinas, with the public premiere taking place in Carnegie Hall on May 27 this year. This disc, however, was made last year, presumably in Kansas (no recording details are provided).

Trotta's musical style is fairly straightforward and, dare I say it, rather bland: aside from a few nods to the 18th century in the opening 'Father, forgive them' and concluding 'It is finished'. not unlike that of Eric Whitacre or Ēriks Ešenvalds. There is none of the severity that one encounters in the recent music of, say, Arvo Pärt, or the intensity; Trotta's music conveys little of the suffering, drama or passion of the subject matter. There is little obviously American in the sound world, either, beyond the colouring of the solo brass players - the trumpet, in particular due more, I suspect, to the tonal qualities of the players than the music itself.

The performance is more than competent, rendering clearly Trotta's relentlessly euphonious choral-and-orchestral textures. Melanie Russell sounds stretched in the climax of her solo in the third movement, 'Behold your son' – not movement 4 as the skimpy booklet states – but David Farwig is more secure in his two solos, 'I thirst', actually the fourth movement, not third as the booklet lists

against his name, and 'It is finished'. Clear sound. **Guy Rickards** 

### 'Heroic Proportions'

JS Bach Prelude and Fugue, 'St Anne', BWV552 Barber Adagio (arr Strickland) Franck Pièce héroïque Stewart Sonetto Willan Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue

Felix Hell org

MSR Classics (F) MS1542 (61' • DDD)

Played on the JW Steere & Son Opus 665 organ at St Mark Lutheran Church, Hanover, PA



Of late, if Bach's St Anne Prelude and Fugue (aka Prelude and 'St Anne's' Fugue,

as on an MSR Classics disc played by Barbara Harbach in an all-Bach programme) appears on disc it is heard transcribed for piano - for instance, Sergio Fiorentino (Piano Classics, 6/12) or Markus Becker (Reger's transcription; Hyperion, 8/09) – or in Schoenberg's orchestral version (MDG, 4/10 or Warner Classics, 11/15). There are dozens of accounts of the organ original available, the most recent that I've noticed being Iveta Apkalna's vivid account (Oehms, 9/15). Felix Hell's quickish performance made in St Mark Lutheran Church, Hanover, Pennsylvania - is a fine if not spectacular rendition.

As with his earlier MSR disc (2005), Bach sits alongside French music – well, Franck's *Pièce héroique* (1878) – and pieces with a North American connection. For many the primary novelty may be conductor-organist William Strickland's arrangement of Barber's *Adagio* for strings (1936-38). This works rather well, the emotion held in check and rapt quietude before swelling out *fortissimo*.

Eric R Stewart's Sonnetto (2012) is less obvious or immediate in appeal, a cogently argued if expressively rather overcast single-movement piece. Curiously, the structure is closer to sonata than sonnet form and there is no declared specific poetic inspiration. While Stewart's Sonetto was written for the organ in Hanover, English-born but Canadian-resident Healey Willan's Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue (1916) was written just two years after the organ was built. Its tripartite structure comes over reasonably well but, like the disc as a whole, is one for the connoisseur rather than the general listener. MSR's sound seemed a touch recessed on my player but had more presence on headphones. Guy Rickards

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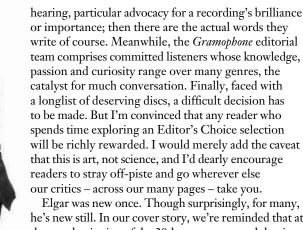
# How music can always offer us something new

ecently I used this space to praise those who support contemporary music, who ensure that music written today is an integral part of our listening life. The occasion then was that James MacMillan's Stabat mater was our Recording of the Month. Well, three issues on, and this month we bestow that accolade on another contemporary disc, this time of music by Jonathan Dove.

The disc, released by Signum, features his Piano Quintet, a string quartet and a powerful and poignant setting of poetry about the Syrian conflict. All three works are performed by the Sacconi Quartet, who also commissioned the third work, In Damascus, and are thus another group to add to our list of contemporary-music advocates deserving praise.

But I raise this again because, among this month's Editor's Choices, Dove's disc ploughs a far from lonely furrow. There's music by Luca Francesconi and Brett Dean from BIS, György Kurtág works for ensemble and choir explored by ECM, and, on 'First Drop', a chance to share the journey taken by Paul Hillier and his Ars Nova Copenhagen choir through an impressive range of current composers. Even where you might not expect modern music, on 'Late Night Lute', Matthew Wadsworth places centre stage a wonderful new suite by Stephen Goss for that most historic of instruments, the theorbo.

'It's all very well', you may say, 'for you to praise the selection as forward-thinking, but then you've chosen them.' People often ask me how I select our Editor's Choices, and in fact they emerge from a multilayered process. Critics may express to me, after an initial



Elgar was new once. Though surprisingly, for many, he's new still. In our cover story, we're reminded that at the very beginning of the 20th century, around the time of The Dream of Gerontius, Elgar was more famous in Germany than in England. A century on, things couldn't be more inverted. It has always intrigued me as to why his music, so loved in his homeland, doesn't seem to travel as well as that of his late-Romantic peers from elsewhere in Europe, a topic I've often discussed with some of today's great Elgarians. With the success of Barenboim's recent recordings of the symphonies – and the fact he's performing them at this year's Proms – now seemed the perfect time to invite our very own Elgar expert abroad, New York-based Andrew Farach-Colton, to explore this intriguing and fascinating question.

Something old, something new, then: such are classical music's vast riches that there is always so much more to discover.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com



### THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'As an American, I am occasionally required to defend my passion for the music of Elgar,' says

### ANDREW FARACH-COLTON

'Consulting Elgarians for my feature may not have provided a conclusive reason for why Elgar is undervalued outside Britain, but it was a rousing rejoinder to keep up the fight.'



Vladimir Ashkenazy gave the first solo piano recital I ever attended,' recalls one of our piano specialists

JEREMY NICHOLAS, who was delighted to interview the pianist and conductor this month. 'To talk to him for an article to mark his 80th birthday, and to find him still so full of energy, was a particular joy."



'Pianists have long had a monopoly on the music of Granados,' says the author of our feature on the

composer, PETER QUANTRILL. 'That's a shame, when he wrote so vividly for voices. Happily, musicians and record companies are slowly waking up. There's so much to discover beyond Goyescas.'

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • David Allen • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Richard Bratby Edward Breen · Liam Cagney · Philip Clark · Alexandra Coghlan · Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows David Fanning - Andrew Farach-Colton - Iain Fenlon - Neil Fisher - Fabrice Fitch - Jonathan Freeman-Attwood Charlotte Gardner • Caroline Gill • David Gutman • Christian Hoskins • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott Richard Lawrence - Andrew Mellor - Kate Molleson - Ivan Moody - Bryce Morrison - Hannah Nepil Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol • Geoffrey Norris • Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Mark Pullinger Peter Quantrill • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Patrick Rucker • Julie Anne Sadie Edward Seckerson • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

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Volume 95 Number 1151

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hone 020 7738 5454

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GRAMOPHONE is published by MA Music Leisure & Travel Ltd. St. Jude's Church. Dulwich Road, London SE24 OPB, United Kingdom.

narkallengroup.com ISSN 0017-310X

The August issue of *Gramophone* is on sale from July 19, the September issue will be on sale from August 16 (both UK). Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of statements in this magazine but we cannot accept responsibility for errors or omissions, or for matters arising responsibility for errors or omissions, or for matters arising from clerical or printers' errors, or an advertiser not completing his contract. Regarding concert listings, all information is correct at the time of going to press. Letters to the editor requiring a personal reply should be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope. We have made every effort to secure permission to use copyright material. Where material has been used inadvertently or we have been unable to trace the copyright owner, acknowledgement will be made in a future issue.

UK subscription rate £64. Printed in England by Southernprint

Printed in England by Southernprint.

North American edition (ISSN 0017-310X):

Gramophome, USPS 881080, is published monthly with an additional issue in September by MA Music Leisure & Travel Ltd, St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London SE24 0PB, United Kingdom. The US annual subscription SE24 0PB, United Kingdom. The US annual subscription price is SS9. Aftreight and mailing in the USA properties is SS9. Aftreight and mailing in the USA properties is SS9. After September 1975. The State of the State of State o

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The 12 most highly recommended recordings of the month

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The latest classical music news

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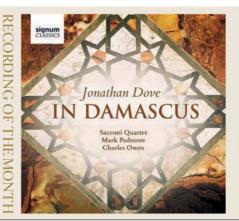
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# GRAMOPHONE Editor's choice



**Cullingford's** pick of the finest recordings from this month's





### **DOVE**

In Damascus Mark Padmore ten Charles Owen pf Sacconi Quartet Signum ► MALCOLM

**RILEY'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 28** 

Two highly engaging chamber works are followed by a moving response to the Syrian conflict. Beautifully performed, it's a very impressive insight into a distinctive composer.



JS BACH The Art of Fugue - excs **BEETHOVEN** String Quartet No 13 **Australian Chamber** Orchestra / Richard

Tognetti vn ABC Classics

Tognetti and his ACO colleagues bring their trademark energy and virtuosity to this hugely enjoyable programme.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 30



**BEETHOVEN. CHOPIN** Piano Works Elisabeth Brauss pf Oehms A really note-worthy debut this. Young

German pianist Elisabeth Brauss's first disc demonstrates impressive assurance, freshness, intelligence and, most of all, talent. A pianist to watch.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 61



EISLER Lieder, Vol 1 Holger Falk bar Steffen Schleiermacher pf Dabringhaus und Grimm The first part of an anticipated four-

volume survey of Hanns Eisler's songs, baritone Holger Falk and pianist Steffen Schleiermacher offering, as critic Hugo Shirley puts it, terrific performances.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 71



**DEAN** Dramatis personae FRANCESCONI Hard

Håkan Hardenberger tpt **Gothenburg Symphony** Orchestra / John

### Storgårds BIS

Two contemporary concertos for trumpet, performed by – as Andrew Mellor puts it - a 'dream team' of musicians.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 35



**'LATE NIGHT LUTE'** Matthew Wadsworth lute Deux-Elles This beautiful recital

wraps carefully chosen and elegantly

played historic repertoire around a fascinating new work from Stephen Goss, drawing imaginatively on the theorbo's unique sound.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 65



KURTÁG Complete Works for Ensemble and Choir **Netherlands Chamber** Choir; AskolSchönberg / Reinbert de Leeuw

**ECM New Series** 

A treasure trove of György Kurtág's compositions, his diversity of approach demonstrated over this three-disc set.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 75



DVOŘÁK 'American' String Quartet & Quintet Škampa Quartet Champs Hill What an era it seems to be

for fine young string quartets, with the excellent Škampa Quartet deservedly numbering among them, as this superb Dvořák disc demonstrates in style.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 50



JS BACH Secular Cantatas, Vol 8 Bach Collegium Japan / Masaaki Suzuki BIS

So frequent an

appearance on this page is Masaaki Suzuki and the Bach Collegium Japan - Bach recording veterans of 22 years – that one can only reiterate past praise again!

► REVIEW ON PAGE 70



'FIRST DROP' Ars Nova Copenhagen / **Paul Hillier** 

Canteloupe Paul Hillier directs a disc of contemporary

choral works that offers a beautiful journey through modern music, sung – and recorded – with evident care and passion.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 80



### **DVD/BLU-RAY**

Challenge Classics

WAGNER Parsifal Sols incl Ventris & Lang; Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra / Iván Fischer

The visual collaboration of Pierre Audi and

Anish Kapoor - and of course, musically, Iván Fischer in the pit - is here captured on film.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 92



### **REISSUE/ARCHIVE**

**JS BACH Brandenburg Concertos** Newstone Heritage A significant set, Harry

Newstone's early stereo Brandenburg Concertos get a deserved re-release.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 97



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# FOR THE RECORD



Major signing: Kissin will select recordings of his live performances for release on Deutsche Grammophon

# Pianist Evgeny Kissin returns to DG for his first solo album in a decade

egendary pianist Evgeny Kissin is set to release his first solo ✓ recital recording in more than a decade this August, after signing an exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon. The double-disc set will document Kissin's evolving relationship with Beethoven in a series of personally programmed live recordings, much like Grigory Sokolov's recent DG releases. The album will include Beethoven's Moonlight, Appassionata, Les Adieux and Op 111 piano sonatas, as well as the Variations in C minor, WoO80.

Since making his mark as a teen prodigy in Russia in the 1980s, Kissin has been renowned for his visionary performances of Romantic masterworks. His previous recordings for DG include landmark collaborations with the Berlin Philharmonic, Herbert von Karajan and Claudio Abbado.

'These recordings were made in the moment of performance,' said Kissin of the new set. 'Live recordings always surpass studio albums for me, because I feel more inspired when playing for an audience. It means a lot to me to be able to share the spirit of that live experience with others.'

# Primephonic launches classical-only streaming service in UK and US

rimephonic has launched a classical-only streaming service. Initially available only in the UK and US, subscriptions cost £14.99/\$14.99 per month, though there is a one-month free trial for new customers.

Since the company already offers downloading, this is a natural progression says CEO Simon Eder: 'Primephonic has been improving the listening experience of classical music fans for years now through our

### IN THE STUDIO

### Hamelin and Andsnes record The Rite of Spring for Hyperion

Marc-André Hamelin and Leif Ove Andsnes have come together for Hyperion to record Stravinsky's two-piano version of *The Rite of Spring* alongside the Concerto for Two Pianos, *Madrid*, *Tango* and the *Circus Polka*. The pair performed pianoduo recitals in London, New York and Chicago earlier this year, juxtaposing the Stravinsky works with music by Mozart and Debussy. Andrew Keener is the producer of this all-Stravinsky disc, which was recorded earlier this year, in April, at the Teldex Studio Berlin.

### More Vaughan Williams songs from Gilchrist and Tilbrook

Tenor James Gilchrist and pianist Anna Tilbrook's recording of Vaughan Williams's song-cycle On Wenlock Edge for Linn Records was shortlisted for a *Gramophone* Award

### Arseny Tarasevich-Nikolaev gets collaborative label deal

ecca Classics and Universal Music Australia have jointly signed 23-year-old Russian pianist Arseny Tarasevich-Nikolaev, grandson of legendary 20th-century pianist Tatiana Nikolaeva. His debut recording will be released in 2018 and will feature a programme of Russian classics including Rachmaninov's

Moments Musicaux, which gives the album its title, plus Prokofiev's Visions fugitives and pieces by Scriabin, Medtner and Tchaikovsky.

Tarasevich-Nikolaev won the Cleveland International Piano Competition in 2012 and was awarded second prize at the 2016 Sydney International Piano Competition. Cyrus Meher-Homji, General Manager of Universal Music Australia's Classics & Jazz division, describes the young musician as 'the piano's ultimate aristocrat', explaining that the young musician's deeply felt and individual performances persuaded him to collaborate with Decca Classics in this exclusive deal.

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In launching into the streaming market, Primephonic will be hoping to compete for the classical-specific audience currently served by such multi-genre companies as Spotify, Apple Music, Tidal and Qobuz.

At launch, Primephonic is offering a catalogue of 100,000 tracks drawn from a wide range of independent labels, though it has recently signed deals with major labels Warner Classics and Sony Classical. Streaming will be delivered in CD-quality sound (16-bit FLAC files), and there's also a significant amount of editorial on the site, including artist and composer biographies and interviews.



All-English artistry: Tilbrook, Gilchrist and RVW

in 2008. They are returning to the composer's songs for their latest recording for Chandos, specifically Songs of Travel, Four Hymns, Six Studies in English Folk Songs, Silent Noon and Orpheus with his Lute.

Gilchrist and Tilbrook have long shown a great commitment to British music, having previously recorded songs by Finzi, Lennox Berkeley, Britten, Warlock, Leighton, Gurney and Bliss. Their recording of Schubert's Die schöne Müllerin (for Orchid) was an Editor's Choice in November 2009.

### Gilbert joins NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra in Hamburg

lan Gilbert has cemented his ongoing relationship with Hamburg's NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra by signing a five-year contract from 2019. The conductor - Music Director of the New York Philharmonic from 2009 until June this year - will become the orchestra's Chief Conductor designate this autumn before officially taking over in the 2019/20 season. Gilbert has a long history with the orchestra, having previously served as its Principal Guest Conductor from 2004 to 2015. The orchestra took up residence in its spectacular new hall earlier this year.

Of today's announcement, Gilbert said: 'How rare it is to find a situation in which it is not only possible to imagine pushing the paradigm of orchestras in the 21st century forward, but one in which all constituent groups are demanding that this progress happen. I'm thrilled to have found such a place.'

Gilbert follows in the footsteps of several distinguished conductors at the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra, previously known as the NDR Symphony Orchestra Hamburg, including Klaus Tennstedt (1979-81), Günter Wand (1982-90), Sir John Eliot Gardiner (1991-94), Herbert Blomstedt (1996-98), Christoph Eschenbach (1998–2004), Christoph von Dohnányi (2004-11) and Thomas Hengelbrock (2011 to present).

As for the New York Philharmonic, its next Music Director will be Jaap van Zweden, who takes up his position in 2018 after 10 years with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. He will continue in his role as Music Director of the Hong Kong Philharmonic.

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### **PODCASTS**

For his new recording 'Lute Night Lute', Matthew Wadsworth (pictured) has paired historical pieces with a fascinating new six-movement work by Stephen Goss. He discusses the album (released on Deux-Elles and named an Editor's Choice this issue), as well as his instrument's repertoire and soundworld, with Martin Cullingford in our latest Podcast, available to stream from our website and to download from iTunes.



### **CZECH PHILHARMONIC** TRIBUTE TO BELOHLÁVEK

So loved was Jiří Bělohlávek by his orchestra that in their first concert since his death, conducted by Semyon Bychkov, they added a special musical tribute to the late conductor - Oskar Nedbal's Valse triste, one of Bělohlávek's favourite pieces. The Czech Philharmonic have given us a copy of the live recording of that performance, which is both moving and beautifully played, and you can enjoy it by visiting Gramophone's website and SoundCloud page.

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Hamburg beckons: the next stop after New York's Lincoln Center for Alan Gilbert is Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie



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# More than just an English gentleman

The idea that Elgar wrote restrained, old-fashioned music reflecting his stiff, traditional exterior can still persist abroad, but many international musicians are discovering an emotional duality in his music that is well worth championing, writes **Andrew Farach-Colton** 

'The only reason Elgar's music sounds

we know to be English' - Julian Rushton

English is that it sounds like Elgar, whom

swear that only in Imperialist England could such a work be tolerated,' Benjamin Britten wrote in his diary following a performance of Elgar's First Symphony at the 1935 London Proms. Britten was hardly alone in reacting with such distaste. A few years earlier, composer-conductor Constant Lambert claimed to be speaking 'for the present generation' when he described Elgar's music as having 'an almost intolerable air of smugness, self-assurance and autocratic benevolence'. Other musicians seemed more flummoxed than contemptuous. In 1949, for instance, Sir Thomas Beecham complained that 'the British public had placed [Elgar] on a pedestal higher than that occupied by any native composer since Purcell'.

British musicians eventually came around, of course, and Elgar is now rightly celebrated not just for his achievements but for his genius. Even Britten had a change of heart, and in his later years gave us insightful, impassioned recordings of

the Introduction and Allegro for strings and The Dream of Gerontius. Beyond the British Isles, however, prejudices against Elgar persist, despite the fact that his advocates have always been an international

lot. Hans Richter, who led the premieres of Wagner's Siegfried and Götterdämmerung, as well as Brahms's Second Symphony, also conducted the premieres of Elgar's Enigma Variations, Gerontius and the First Symphony. Mahler and Toscanini both had the Enigma Variations in their repertoire. In 1905, Fritz Kreisler told a British journalist: 'If you want to know whom I consider to be the greatest living composer, I say without hesitation, Elgar ... I say this to please no one; it is my own conviction.' And yet, here we are, more than a century later, and – with the exception of Germany, perhaps – Elgar remains a hard sell outside the UK. Why?

For Daniel Barenboim, who has championed Elgar's music for nearly half a century now, part of the answer lies in the historical

context. 'Remember that Elgar was much more famous in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century than in England. The performance of *Gerontius* in Düsseldorf in 1902 opened many doors and many ears for him in Germany, and he became a great figure in England only after that. But he has suffered from the fact that there had really been no – how shall I put it? – substantial English composer since Henry Purcell. Therefore, the adjective "English" is always attached to his name: "the English composer Elgar". You would never say "the French composer Debussy" or "the German composer Brahms" or "the Italian"

composer Puccini". And it was difficult because music was not associated with the English.

In other words, Elgar's music was obliged to define what 'English music' sounded like to an international audience that did not view the English as being particularly musical, at least in

a creative sense. Julian Rushton, an English musicologist and Elgar scholar, argues that Elgar was in fact 'quintessentially European', and 'the only reason his music sounds English is that it sounds like Elgar, whom we

know to be English'. Anthony Burgess puts it more amusingly: 'I know that Elgar is not manic enough to be Russian, not witty or pointilliste enough to be French, not harmonically simple enough to be Italian, and not stodgy enough to be German. We arrive at his Englishry by pure elimination.' Indeed, Elgar claimed to have absolutely no interest in native folksong or in the work of English Renaissance masters like Tallis and Dowland. An autodidact, he learned his craft through studying and performing music by the great Central European masters, and their influence is readily evident. Still, Elgar has his own, immediately recognisable sound. Elgar always sounds like

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### EDWARD ELGAR

Elgar, even in an early work like the *Froissart* Overture. And to many, there is – by necessity, Rushton might say – something intrinsically English about this sound. Or is there?

Let's start with Elgar's greatest hit, the one everyone knows even if they don't know that Elgar wrote it. 'Elgar's reputation is overwhelmed by the cliché that derives from the first *Pomp and Circumstance March*,' says the Swiss-born, American conductor and musicologist Leon Botstein. 'It's

associated with pompous British Imperialism. It's viewed to be Victorian, and Elgar likely suffers from our prejudice against Victorian aesthetics. Certainly, he suffered during the period after the First World War when Art Nouveau, Beardsley, that entire Victorian visual aesthetic, was already way out of fashion. It was considered decorative, stylised.' And, of course, it is precisely this 'smug', 'Imperialist' character that caused Britten and Lambert such revulsion.

Elgar's exterior persona reinforced the cliché. He was born neither an aristocrat nor moneyed, but rather achieved his position in society through his music. He longed for his work to be understood and appreciated, and he also wanted to be esteemed as a gentleman. These desires became intertwined



 $\hbox{`You can always dig deeper and find more': Johannes Moser records Elgar's Cello Concerto}\\$ 

and drove his actions both in public as well as private, and thus he chased after honours and accolades as proud evidence of his genius and industriousness. How could this not be reflected in his art? 'His music can certainly be jingoistic in a kind of Victorian way,' says American conductor David Zinman. 'But this was his nature. He came across as very broad and bluff, but he had this very soft inside.' Yet, to see inside, beyond that bluff exterior, required the belief

that it was worth the effort – or even to acknowledge that there was anything there to look for. Zinman remembers a rehearsal of the First Symphony with the Philadelphia Orchestra some years ago. 'I was telling them a little bit about General Gordon and the background of the work, and one of the horn players shouted, "You mean General Boredom, don't you?" But I think that attitude from orchestra musicians is gone now, thankfully.'

Conductor Vasily Petrenko believes that one of the reasons Russian audiences – and some Russian musicians, too – fail to experience the full emotional impact of Elgar's music may be due to essential cultural differences. 'If, for instance, you compare Elgar and Tchaikovsky, Tchaikovsky's emotions are very open. You can sense immediately if the music is crying





Elgar was 'in total control of the orchestra' says Barenboim, pictured here conducting Gerontius, a work which, for Botstein (right), creates 'an expansive landscape of sound'

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'Elgar's scores are really wonderful to look at': conductor David Zinman

or happy, dramatic or full of fun. It's all very clear, sometimes to the point of being hysterical. In Elgar, however, quite often it's hidden or restrained. It has this power inside but it doesn't appear on the outside that often. I was discussing this in Moscow with musicians in the orchestra, asking what they thought of the Elgar symphonies. They said the music was not emotionally elaborate enough, at least not enough to be visible. They feel that it's great music but that audiences don't immediately understand its emotional impact, which is probably why it's not played that often. That, and it is difficult to play.'

Petrenko adds that there is far less 'politeness' in Russian society than in British society. 'On the other hand, people think about the English as being noble, restrained, and trying to put things in order, yet behind that - inside - there's such an intense fire. And when the emotions finally do come out, sometimes it's outrageous. Russians let their emotions out quickly and then they are just as quickly forgotten. In English culture, that holding back and then the outburst - it's not forgotten. And that's what you find in Elgar's symphonies.'

### People think about the English as being noble, restrained. Yet behind that - inside there's such an intense fire' - Vasily Petrenko

Cellist Johannes Moser, born in Germany to a German father and Canadian mother, looks at the issue from a different angle. 'Like so many of his European peers, Elgar gave us a portrait of his time. But he's doing more than that. He's very smart and is able to sneak in uncomfortable details without them being noticed on first sight. I love this sense of a double layer, and of course it's typical for all the great symphonic composers. You can always dig deeper and find more. Look at the opening of the Cello Concerto, for example: the first statement is so strong, there's so much conviction. Then it turns to this soft melody, like a sicilienne. It feels so simple to me and yet somehow dangerous at the same time, as if something is lurking, building up. This double layer is fascinating to me; there are these different intentions working at the same time.'

American cellist Alisa Weilerstein sees the Cello Concerto as standing apart from Elgar's previous work. 'In the Second Symphony, for example, there is a kind of grandiose character which can lead one to think about this massive British Empire.

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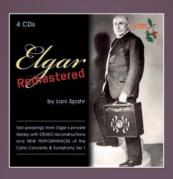
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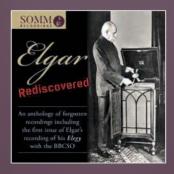
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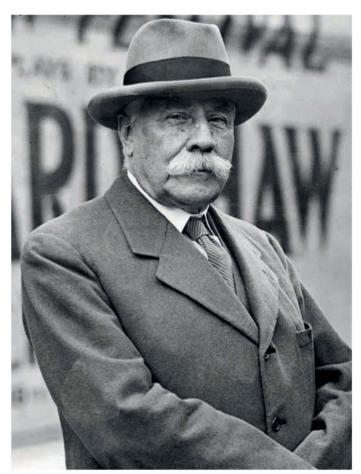






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and melodic vocabulary. Elgar was seen as Victorian.'

Barenboim brings forth a strikingly similar argument. 'I think Elgar suffered from the fact that he was considered not modern enough for those looking at the music of the future and not international enough for the conservatives. This destiny has stood in the way of other composers, too, like Busoni, for example.'

### 'Elgar was in fact a very imaginative, adventuresome, progressive composer with a distinctive aesthetic' - Leon Botstein

But Elgar was modern enough, at least as far as Botstein is concerned: 'I believe Elgar was in fact a very imaginative, adventuresome, progressive composer with a distinctive aesthetic.' As to the oft-repeated complaint that Elgar 'padded' his scores with repeated sequences, Botstein responds: 'He uses repetition and sequences to set up the expectation of predictability and then defeat it. And if we consider that the normative in composition involves the absence of repetition – what Schoenberg termed "developing variation" – well, that's only one aesthetic criterion. Wagner, via Liszt, used repetition to brilliant effect, and Elgar learned from this. *Gerontius* and the symphonies don't condense time, they create an expansive landscape of sound which *extends* musical time.'

Botstein continues: 'Going to a concert, for Elgar's audiences, allowed them the ability to construct a narrative, privately, by hearing music – listening as daydreaming. Schoenberg, and to some extent Brahms, privileged the idea of variation,

But in the Concerto, he transcends that. There's no façade of politeness. What we hear is honesty, earnestness, and a lack of sentimentality. When I think about the third movement and also the very end of the work, I imagine Elgar staring at himself in the mirror, almost unable to speak. And what I find so striking, so amazing, is that he is baring his soul yet it is very private at the same time. If we're talking about a double layer or duality in his music, it's this.'

The Cello Concerto has had international success not just because it's a relatively compact, elegiac masterpiece, but also because – let's be honest – a cellist's repertoire is limited. The Violin Concerto is far less frequently heard, due to its length and technical demands. But how to explain the rarity of the *Enigma* Variations? Botstein thinks that this work suffers the same fate as Brahms's *Haydn* Variations in that, with the current programming model, both are neither long enough to end a concert nor short enough to open one.

As for the perceived indifference to Elgar's music, Botstein makes a compelling point: 'Elgar lacks the exotic quality. Dvořák was successful in Germany because his music was considered exotic (and it annoyed the hell out of him, actually). Sibelius was exotic in his cultivation of a Northern spirituality, one might say. Exoticism certainly worked for Tchaikovsky, as well as many others. But England wasn't thought of as an exotic place – not for Americans, certainly. And this plays into the fact that Elgar is not credited as being a musical innovator. Sibelius was viewed to have an original harmonic



At home and abroad: Elgar composing and, top left, in Malvern, Pennsylvania, in September 1930



Recording Carissima in 1914, the first work of Elgar's to be recorded and in fact the first ever performance of this small-scale orchestral piece, conducted by the composer

'What's wonderful is his recordings aren't

indulgent - they show his character and the

style of playing at that time' - David Zinman

which meant that the experience of listening was to follow the evolution of musical thought and the virtuosity of musical invention. Elgar was slightly more concerned with narrative, and that's what's so interesting about the *Enigma* Variations. It's a perfect synthesis of the Lisztian and the Brahmsian, the two so-called opposite trends of 19th-century late-Romantic

aesthetics. And that's what Elgar feels like to me: a kind of brilliant synthetic figure. In the *Enigma* Variations, you have all of the virtuosity of thematic transformation at the same time that you have

characterisation of people and a story being told.'

This narrative aspect of Elgar's style likely has implications for its interpretation, too, and it's worth pondering what effect different performance styles might have had on the reception of his works. 'Everyone has to find their own way, their own relationship with the music,' Barenboim muses. 'I think that, very often in performances I've heard of Elgar's music, there is not enough attention to the harmonic progression. Sometimes the harmonies are quite simple and straightforward, like at the beginning of the First Symphony, then they move into strange and personal modulations. This is a very important element. The other is a question of that "Victorian" grandeur which is very often exaggerated. And I'm thinking that in both symphonies there are so many passages which repeat themselves at a very loud dynamic. You have to be extremely careful not to give your all the first time around because a few bars later it comes back a second, and very often a third time. It's important,

in order to achieve a strategic understanding of the movement, to have the capacity to let the dynamics of the music grow. So careful observation of the dynamics is vital, and Elgar was particularly meticulous in his dynamic markings.' Zinman, too, notes the unusual precision of Elgar's instructions. 'His scores are really wonderful to look at,' he enthuses. 'They're so

clearly written, with attention to detail, to every note.'

But the finer points aren't everything, says Petrenko: 'I think the key is in how much attention you pay to the details versus the long

the details versus the long structures. If you focus too much attention on the small phrases, you may lose the overall architectural shape. The symphonies, especially, require such a long perspective. But if you just drive through without sufficient attention to the details, the music also sounds wrong. So a certain balance needs to be kept, but

this can vary greatly from conductor to conductor.'
According to Weilerstein, instrumentalists face similar issues. 'There's a fluidity in Elgar which I think is important because it speaks to his refusal to be self-pitying, even if the music is romantic and very intimate or even tragic.' Moser agrees and feels that there needs to be more questioning of interpretative traditions. 'I have noticed that in the first rehearsal, orchestras will automatically play in a certain tempo that's not necessarily related to Elgar's markings. So I believe there must a strong tradition of how Elgar is 'supposed' to be played that, for example, supersedes the fact that in the opening of the Cello Concerto he writes *moderato* with a metronome mark of

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Elgar conducting a performance of his own music in 1920; his interpretations have proved both controversial and influential

'His recordings have a sense of forward

movement that's unequalled. I've learned

tremendously from them' - Daniel Barenboim

66, not andante. This goes for conductors, too, of course. I think it's healthy to ask if the tradition is simply a matter of comfort worn in over the years or is there some meta-information that should be taken into account.' Moser says he has studied both of Beatrice Harrison's 'wonderful' recordings of the Cello Concerto and, even with the composer holding the baton,

there are deviations in tempo. 'She takes the first movement slower than it's marked, and that was a surprise to me.'

Zinman says he's listened to every last one of Elgar's recordings, and he too has

noted tempo discrepancies. 'He may have been influenced by the fact that he had to fit music onto one side of a record, so maybe the tempos are a little fast. But what's wonderful about it is that it's not indulgent at all and really shows his character. It also shows the style of orchestral playing at that time, with the sliding from note to note. Elgar was a very good violinist himself, and often in his scores you find his fingerings for string passages. I always insist these fingerings are played, even if they're a little awkward, because in order to do them, you have

There's no question that Elgar's extensive recorded legacy is an invaluable document, but does it offer clues beyond a glimpse into early 20th-century performance tradition that might help us to gain easier access to the music's emotional heart? Petrenko is slightly skeptical of putting too much faith in the recordings. 'Yes, one can always get interesting ideas from composer-conductors, and for me it's as if I'm getting the

composer's intentions firsthand.' He adds, though, that he's not sure that Elgar was a great conductor. 'There are moments in the recordings where the orchestra seems to be compromising because they were not able to understand his gesticulations. So for my own interpretations I take some of his tempos, some of his phrasing and articulation, but there are also times where I have to make things a little easier and more logical for the orchestra.'

Barenboim is more sanguine: 'Elgar's recordings have a sense of forward movement that is absolutely unique and unequalled by anyone who has played or recorded these pieces since,' he says. 'He brings out a nervous quality in the music, and I've learned tremendously from these documents. One can hear that he was in total command of the orchestra.' So while Elgar might have liked to portray himself as the very model of a stiff-upper-lipped English squire, his own music-

making - with that consistent, persistent 'nervous quality' Barenboim identifies - reveals a more complicated reality. And isn't this conflict an essential part of what Petrenko so neatly describes as the 'power inside' Elgar's music?

While I was writing this article, I happened upon an essay in American author Anne Fadiman's Ex Libris: Confessions

> 'especially tender feelings' Scott. 'Americans', she

of a Common Reader, in which she describes her fascination with the history of polar exploration and her for Captain Robert Falcon

writes, 'admire success. Englishmen admire heroic failure.' In his greatest music, such as the Second Symphony - composed at the same time that Scott was embarked on the tragic Terra Nova Expedition - Elgar conveys a poignant sense of heroic striving and tenacity that ends not in ticker-tape jubilation but noble acceptance. In one of Scott's final diary entries, the explorer wrote: 'I do not regret this journey, which has shown that Englishmen can endure hardships, help one another, and meet death with as great a fortitude as ever in the past. We took risks, we knew we took them; things have come out against us, and therefore we have no cause for complaint, but bow to the will of Providence, determined still to do our best to the last.' What better encapsulation not only of what makes Elgar English, but what makes Elgar Elgar. @ Daniel Barenboim's recording of The Dream of Gerontius is reviewed on page 72; he conducts Symphonies Nos 1 and 2 at the BBC Proms on July 15 and 16, available on BBC iPlayer for 30 days

# COMPOSING FROM THE HEART

The music of Spanish composer Enrique Granados, born 150 years ago, isn't easy to categorise because, as he freely admitted, his main objective was to express his feelings, writes Peter Quantrill

obody is quite sure what to make of Enrique Granados. Take the fifth of his *Danzas españolas*, 'Andaluza'. All 12 dances in the set were written for piano, but the thrumming bass line fits the guitar perfectly – and this from a Spanish composer who could not play the instrument and wrote no music for it. Without quoting any local themes, Granados evokes a melancholy mood with a modal, Moorish twist to the harmony that fits seamlessly within the flamenco culture of Andalucia in southern Spain. Yet Granados himself was Catalan through and through.

Six different versions of 'Andaluza' are included on the final disc of a new, seven-CD Sony/RCA compilation issued to celebrate the anniversary of the composer's birth in 1867. Add in Alicia de Larrocha playing the original and Julian Bream with his own transcription, earlier in the set, and that makes eight in all. What's extraordinary is that, while listening to them in sequence, each version sounds like an original, while reflecting back the personality of its performers. In an orchestral transcription, Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia give it a waltz-like swing; Pablo Casals transforms it into a proud, strutting song without words, with his pianist Nikolai Mednikoff making an uncanny imitation of a guitar in those

oscillating, spread bass chords. In the hands of Fritz Kreisler, the piece is more introverted, at least as supple and fake-Viennese as his own *Tambourin chinois*; while Jascha Heifetz projects the melody much more forcefully, returning to it some of its original flamenco brilliance, with a few improvisatory slides and trills thrown in for good measure.

None of these musicians traduces Granados or his unassuming miniature; rather, they cast light not only on the many-sided nature of the composer's work but also on how resistant it is to the facile clichés heaped upon it throughout the past century. As both scholar and performer, Douglas Riva has worked harder than anyone to dispel such clichés, having recorded the complete piano music for Naxos.



'Man of the world': Enrique Granados

'Many composers are perceived as composing in a certain style,' he remarks to me. 'Any movement of *Iberia* is instantly recognisable as being by Albéniz, for example. But in Granados there is no clear line to follow. There's his voice, his sensibility, but they're not all of a sort. It's hard to pin him down, and maybe that's why he's considered a Spanish nationalist because people don't know what else to say. He's very hard to classify.'

The Basque-born conductor Juanjo Mena is more specific: 'It is impossible to ignore the educational and cultural influence of the country in which he studied and grew up, which at that time – as was the case with many European countries – had an enormous interest in "cultural nationalism". It's logical that the rich tradition of Spanish folklore in turn inspired composers such as Granados. However, this does not mean that Granados's music should be imprisoned as exclusively Spanish, since the influence of his stay in Paris and his knowledge of the European musical movements led his music to be considered at times Wagnerian, Straussian, belonging to the verismo school or displaying the scholastic conservatism of Vincent D'Indy. Granados himself rebelled against those who wanted to define his music as "Catalan" because all he wanted to express in his music was what he felt

and admired, without it being put into any geopolitical straitjacket.'

To claim Granados as an innovator would be a stretch. The son of an army general, he retained a conservative outlook; not for him the brave new worlds of Debussy and Schoenberg. It would be easy to say that Granados hewed to a Romantic inheritance – except that, in mid-19th-century Spain, he didn't have one. By 1883 he was already a pianist of accomplishment when he came to the attention of composer and music scholar Felipe Pedrell (1841-1922), who encouraged his creative gifts without imparting a technical discipline to the compositional process; Pedrell's teaching was more concerned with dropping the needle on other music that would stimulate his charges, but with the aim in mind of creating a distinctively national,

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Spanish school of music. According to Mena, 'the influence of Pedrell in Granados's musical education was very important in two opposite ways. Firstly, it was very positive due to his knowledge of the richness of the musical tradition of Spanish popular melodies; but by contrast, perhaps he didn't instil in Granados a solid enough technical base, and a deep enough knowledge of the major symphonic forms.'

At the centre of Granados's work is the piano, both in terms of quantity and inspiration. He composed at the keyboard, and even his song melodies sit naturally under the fingers. 'The themes in the *Cuentos de* la juventud are really pianistic melodies,' remarks Riva. 'In contrast to that, some of the Tonadillas are not particularly vocal, but they're tremendous songs. And it's important to acknowledge them as works of chamber music - in the Canciones amatorias, the piano

is as important as the voice. The two textures are entirely wrapped up in each other. In the later *Tonadillas* you might find certain Spanish qualities but at that time he was concerned to evoke the majas and majos of Goya's era.'

Granados designated those *Cuentos de la juventud* as his Opus 1 – though, as with so much of his music, superficial impressions are misleading; he didn't complete them until 1910. The

evident debt to Schumann's Kinderszenen at the outset is also a telling one: particularly once he had returned from two formative years in Paris, Granados set his horizons much further afield than

local or even national squabbles over establishing an art-music culture. Chopin and Schumann were his models, and getting to grips with his music requires a sensibility, a habit of listening – maybe playing, too – refined by their storytelling forms without words.

The six Escenas Románticas (1903-04) are a case in point, opening with a mazurka and a berceuse, ending with a 'poetic exaltation' and linked with free recitatives. A feel for the elastic art of rubato is key to both their performance and appreciation. Whether through lack of formal training or inclination, Granados tended to shun sonata form, counterpoint and associated Austro-German conventions of development. A piece such as the 'Lento con ecstatis', the third of the Escenas Románticas, grows both in itself and on the listener through gradually intensified repetition and elaboration. In its subtitle, 'The Poet and the Nightingale', the movement establishes a theme that would resonate through the rest of the composer's career and surface at crucial points. Alone, a man or woman muses wordlessly at night. A bird replies without



A poster for a 1915 recital by Granados, a talented pianist, of a programme that included excerpts from his own Goyescas

'He's considered a Spanish nationalist

- he's very hard to classify' - Douglas Riva

because people don't know what else to say

bringing resolution. In fact, the nightingale dies in the central movement of the *Libro de horas* ('Book of Hours', 1912), to the slow-moving, implacable throb of a bass line beneath increasingly overwrought chords.

Development is a term of limited use in thinking about the body of Granados's output as well as its internal workings. After all, with the *Danzas españolas* in the early 1890s, he had attracted

the admiration of fellow composers such as Saint-Saëns and Massenet. Even so, it's impossible to ignore the steadily encroaching influence of Wagner on not only Granados's music but also

on all of Barcelona's culture during the first decade of the last century. In a cycle such as the *Libro de horas*, this influence tended to surface in local points of chromatic tension rather than in longer-term musical or dramatic ambitions.

Mena observes that influence in both the harmonic and orchestral aspects of Granados, but believes that the composer's 'non-assimilation of the thematic and tonal idea of the Wagnerian leitmotif' wasn't a conscious decision. 'As with many other Spanish composers, perhaps it's due to the complexity of the task in hand, to a certain amount of ignorance of the compositional techniques that are in effect the tools that achieve long musical development of the subjects; these tools make the musical discourse an organic whole, as opposed to an accumulation of brilliant but unconnected themes that aren't nurtured because of a lack of skill in this area.'

The composer's gifts as a performer are central both to the pianistic feel of his music – even when scored for orchestra or voice – and its structure. 'Music simply poured out of him,' observed Casals and recalled an occasion when they had passed

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### **ENRIQUE GRANADOS**

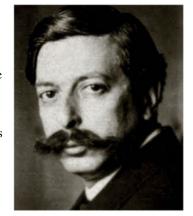
an attractive woman in the lobby of a hotel. Observing her closely before dashing upstairs to his room – Casals in pursuit – the composer improvised a hot-blooded fantasy at the piano. Although Granados drowned in 1916 in a futile attempt to save his wife Amparo from the waters of the English Channel (returning from the operatic premiere of *Goyescas* in New York, their ship was holed by a U-Boat), uxoriousness did not extend to fidelity; he enjoyed affairs with several well-to-do ladies of Barcelona including Clotilde Godó, who was also his piano student.

Teaching was a practical necessity for Granados. 'My son is poor, very poor,' confessed his mother to the mother of Amparo before their marriage in 1892. 'For now, he has nothing more than a good name. I have no doubt that

over time he will be successful, but that will not just happen, and the struggle will be difficult.' Giving concerts and lessons provided the necessary support for his growing family – Enrique and Amparo left six orphaned children – but allowed little time for composition. Only in the last few years of his life did both his means and status as a foundation figure in Barcelona's musical life enable him to accomplish a sequence of more ambitious projects.

By then Granados had written educational piano methods which are still used, especially for the pedal, and founded the conservatory which now bears the name of his most dedicated pupil, Frank Marshall. In turn, Marshall passed on to a new generation – principal among them Alicia de Larrocha and Rosa Sabater – both the Granados method and the refinements to his piano works which he had made after they were published.

Beyond naming a street in his honour, Barcelona has shown reluctance to return the affection of its most distinguished musical son. Granados had just (if naïve) cause to complain of insular attitudes that may still prevail. 'It seems to me that art has nothing to do with politics,' he wrote. 'This matter has caused me unpleasantness to the point of receiving anonymous letters in which I have been accused of writing Andalusian Dances! As if this were a sin ... I consider myself as much a Catalan as anyone, but in my music I want to express what I feel ... be it Andalusian or Chinese.'



T've been accused of writing Andalusian Dances! I want to express what I feel ... be it Andalusian or Chinese - Granados

The one building in the city still bearing his name is a recital hall which was built to his specifications and opened in 1911. Used for many years as a studio, the Sala Granados was sold earlier this year and faces an uncertain future; a vigorous local campaign is afoot to restore the hall to its original purpose. However, Goethe's idea of architecture being frozen music is partially fulfilled by the Palau de la Música Catalana; partially, because warmth, not ice, is the keynote of its sinuous lines and rainbowglassed roof, as vibrant and inimitable as the proud opening sweep of *Goyescas* for piano.

Wagner was the dominant musical inspiration for the architect, Lluís Domènech i Montaner, and a certain cringing deference to the German composer may be read into busts of Palestrina,

Bach and Beethoven adorning the façade of the Palau, not to mention the fresco depicting the ride of the Valkyries, but when I see the hall, I hear Granados. It opened in 1908, and on March 11, 1911, it hosted an event of signal fulfilment in the composer's life: the first public performance of *Goyescas*. Ever since his first visit to the Prado in 1898, Granados had turned over, in his head and on paper, a tribute that would express, in Mena's words, 'the deep love he felt for Spain portrayed by Goya, which is full of contrasts and richness in a story of love and death, with a tragic end'.

At the heart of *Goyescas* lies 'The Maiden and the Nightingale'. Here, too, is the highpoint of the composer's elaborated-variation style. In Granados's subsequent opera, the maiden sings her lament to a nightingale and tells of her fear that her lover will be killed in a duel with a rival. According to Granados, the piece should be played 'not with the grief of a widow but with the jealousy of a wife'. His dedication of the movement to Amparo makes this instruction all the more intriguing.

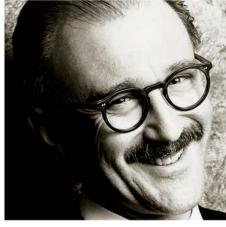
'The Maiden and the Nightingale' became his best-known work, but that 1911 concert concluded with the world premiere of a far more formally audacious work *El cant de les estrelles* (The Song of the Stars). Legacy wrangles hid the piece from view for decades, and the scoring for piano, organ and three antiphonal choirs militates against frequent performance, but according to Riva, soloist on the first and so far only recording, 'It is an overwhelming piece in many ways. It's a piano concerto



Alícia de Larrocha, who inherited Granados's legacy



Juanjo Mena, critical admirer of Granados's music



Douglas Riva, tireless promoter of the piano works

with organ and choruses rather than orchestra although it doesn't use the concerto form!' An opening five-minute fantasy for solo piano gives way to a three-voice fugue to which the piano brings 'a menacing, mysterious commentary. Only at the conclusion of that does the female chorus, representing the stars, enter.' The Catalan text is based on Heine and was probably devised by Granados himself.

What Granados referred to as his 'mixture of bitterness and grace' in Goyescas does not fully survive the piano suite's later translation into a series of operatic tableaux for his one-act opera that goes by the same name. Mena is not alone in laving the fault at the feet of the librettist, Fernando Periquet y Zuaznabar; the conductor is more attracted to María del Carmen (1898), Granados's first opera. Here, too, editorial problems have hampered stagings, though the Wexford Festival production of 2003 is available on Naxos and amply confirms Mena's positive assessment of the work as a whole. The libretto is much better - it's a rural drama, with elements of folklore from the Murcia region, in verismo style and with dramatic Wagnerian musical innovations. It's perhaps more modernist than Goyescas, with greater French influence and also some German influence.' Granados himself rated it his finest opera and perhaps, as with so much of his music, its time will soon come. @

### **EXPLORE ENRIQUE GRANADOS**

Six recordings capturing his varied output



Enrique Granados: The Collection Alicia de Larrocha, Montserrat Caballé,

Pablo Casals, Julian Bream, Ataúlfo Argenta, etc

Sony

A new compilation of the bestknown works in classic, mostly native accounts: the principal draw is a first CD reissue for *Goyescas* the opera, conducted by Ataúlfo Argenta in its first recording.



Alicia de Larrocha - The First Recordings DG Eloquence Spacious new

remasterings for *Goyescas* and the *Danzas españolas*, made in New York during 1954-55; for technical address and command of rubato at least the equal of her follow-ups.



Piano Works
Maria Luisa Cantos
MDG
A superbly
recorded

single-disc introduction to Granados, issued in May this year, encompassing the cosmopolitan breadth of his



estrelles (The Song
of the Stars)
Douglas Riva pf
Mark Kruczek org

Voices of Ascension / Dennis Keene

The first recording of Granados's late masterpiece, coupled with spiritual works by Catalan composers of the next generation including Manuel Blancafort, Pablo Casals, Enrique Morera and Manuel Oltra.



Complete Songs Elena de la Merced, David Menéndez, Ruben Fernández Aguirre, Carol García

IBS Classical

Several valuable first recordings on this new release featuring a strong, local cast.



Tonadillas &
Amatorias
Conchita Badia sop
Alicia de Larrocha pf
La Mà de Guido

An obscure label, available for download on streaming services only, just 40 minutes in length and sounds home-made: but don't miss these supremely authentic accounts of the two principal song-cycles.





# STILLMIGHTY —AT80

The legendary pianist and conductor Vladimir Ashkenazy may have entered his ninth decade, but his sprightly manner, intense work schedule and continuing appetite for new repertoire suggest a man half his age, writes **Jeremy Nicholas** 



e's Conductor Laureate of the Philharmonia Orchestra and the NHK and Iceland Symphony Orchestras, and Principal Guest Conductor of the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana. As Decca's longest-serving artist he has won numerous prizes, including seven Grammy Awards. He currently gives about 100 concerts a year. And earlier this month, on July 6, he celebrated his 80th birthday.

It is hard to believe that the compact, diminutive figure who greets me has just entered his ninth decade. In the 10 years since we last met, Vladimir Ashkenazy has changed not one bit. He walks the same, moves with the same energy - this is mid-morning, after a tiring concert the previous evening and, presumably, a late night and talks in the same measured way in still charmingly accented English. Maybe it's even the same white polo neck as a decade ago, which he is wearing today under a beige jacket, buttoned at the waist and two sizes too big. (With the possible exception of the late Sir Neville Marriner, no conductor has done more for the podium polo neck than Ashkenazy).

Also the same is his autograph. He gave the first solo piano recital this writer ever attended. Having dug out the autograph acquired on that occasion more than 50 years ago (Cheltenham Town Hall, Beethoven Op 2

No 1), I show him this souvenir. 'My goodness. It is exactly as I sign today. Look!' And to prove it, he re-autographs the same scrap of paper with today's date, a typical Ashkenazy gesture.

We are in Universal's London offices and I notice how, despite the fame, success and many years of adulation, Ashkenazy's innate courtesy and quiet dignity automatically command the affection and somewhat awed respect of everyone with whom he comes into contact. Early on in our conversation I am reminded, too, what an intensely humble man he is. Our last encounter was to promote his disc of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, the first time he had recorded solo Bach (though an early LP for Decca featured the D minor Concerto). In the intervening years, he has recorded the Six Partitas, *Italian Concerto*, *French Overture* and now all the *French Suites*. 'What should I do next?' he asks. I suggest the *Goldbergs*. His response?

'I always thought of it. But you know what, after Glenn [Gould]'s two recordings I don't think I could do it on the same level. I don't think one could do it better. I told Glenn. I told him that the way he did it, I don't think it should be done again. That's it!'

So what is the next piano recording to be? What is he working on? He can't remember. He phones his wife for help but she can't be reached. What about orchestral work? He can't recall and consults his diary. You know the Philharmonia asked me to do a season to mark the centenary of the Russian Revolution?' Is the Revolution something to be celebrated? Did he think the Soviet era was a force for good as far as music was concerned? Ashkenazy smiles. 'It's complex. Would we have had the same works from Shostakovich? His Second and Third Symphonies were constructed in a way to please the authorities. They are not his best pieces. The Fourth Symphony as you know was denounced by the authorities. It could not be performed. And then came the Fifth Symphony which was acclaimed everywhere by everybody. I am not a composer but I'm sure that people with great creative gifts like Prokofiev or Shostakovich, of course they must have felt the oppression around them but, being genii, they managed to incorporate it into their expression. And that expression was a message to people of what we are, what we experience. People of that spiritual height managed to do it. People of not quite the same height could not do it.'

### 'When we moved to the West, we didn't know if we would survive. Everything was so different from the Soviet Union'

Back to the Russian Revolution season, and his diary reveals that among the unusual or rarely heard offerings he has chosen are the symphonic excerpts composed by Shostakovich to accompany Eisenstein's seminal 1925 film *Battleship Potemkin* (Ashkenazy will conduct a live screening in October 2017); Mosolov's *The Iron Foundry*, Glière's Concerto for coloratura soprano and orchestra and *The Red Poppy* ballet suite (in March 2018); and, in May 2018, an all-Prokofiev programme including *Seven, they are Seven* for large orchestra, chorus and tenor, and *Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the Revolution* featuring an accordion orchestra, military band, megaphone and maxim gun.

Ashkenazy has been far more adventurous, too, in his choice of recorded repertoire than one might suppose from a scan of his Decca discography where perhaps the most surprising release of recent years was an album of piano music by Howard 'The Snowman' Blake (in which Ashkenazy's son Vovka joins him for the two-piano works). The two have been friends since the 1960s when the latter, then working as a projectionist at the National Film Theatre, arranged a private showing for the pianist of Ivan the Terrible. The eponymous 'Walking in the Air' album was released in 2014. 'I like his dedication to composition,' Ashkenazy tells me. 'He's not trying to be philosophical but he's interesting and inventive.' Away from the standard repertoire that dominates his Decca years one can find, on Ondine, discs of Taneyev, Joseph Suk, Paganini and Berlioz, Blacher (including the Clarinet Concerto with Ashkenazy's other son Dimitri), and Rautavaara (his Third Piano Concerto commissioned by Ashkenazy). And there are two further contemporary 'B' composers he has championed on disc recently: the Norwegian Flint Juventino Beppe (formerly known as Fred Jonny Berg) – a Blu-ray audio disc entitled 'Remote Galaxy' was released by 2L in 2014 - and the Israeli-French-British



Moscow, 1962: Ashkenazy (second from left) won joint First Prize with John Ogdon (second from right) at the second International Tchaikovsky Competition



Always at the piano: Ashkenazy in 1963 with his son Vovka, now also a pianist

Nimrod Borenstein (b1969), a disc of whose music, including his Violin Concerto, will be released this autumn, marking Ashkenazy's first recording for Chandos.

He has one more concert ('We're playing in Italy. Somewhere. We record it, then I go back home') and then two months of summer holiday until September. What does he do on holiday? 'It's very simple. I practice the piano.' On holiday? 'Every day. There will be a lot of repertoire I probably want to do. I can't say what but there is always something. First, we will spend a couple of weeks in Finland where we have a small house. After that we have a boat in the Mediterranean. I have a good piano there too. We like Greece very much so we go from island to island for nearly two months.'

### 'On holiday, it's very simple. I practise the piano every day. We have a boat in the Mediterranean. I have a good piano there'

It seems, then, that Ashkenazy's £100 concerts annually are played not within a 12-month period but over 10 months. That works out at between two and three concerts a week. Plus the dates in the studio. Plus the interviews. Plus the studying of scores. Plus keeping the piano-playing in shape. Plus commitments such as being Patron of Southbank Sinfonia, the London-based orchestra for young graduates entering the profession. All at 80 years of age. How does he do it? Does he have a special diet? Does he visit the gym? 'No, I lead a very straightforward life. All I do, basically, is play the piano and conduct concerts. I hardly do anything else. I plan very carefully. And I am lucky. I am married to a wonderful Icelandic lady. We have been married now for nearly 57 years. Not bad for a start! She knows how difficult it is to do what I am doing. She's a very

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good musician with absolute pitch and she remembers' - here Ashkenazy pauses to emphasise every word – 'everything -I - have - ever - played. She has a musical memory beyond our understanding. I have a very good memory but hers is incredible. She has been such a help in my activity, you couldn't imagine better. In everything. Spiritually as well as musically. When we first moved to the West [in 1963] it was a very dramatic decision. We didn't know whether we would survive or not, didn't know the West from the point of view of making a living there and everything that an artist has to deal with – agents, musical life - which was totally different from the Soviet Union. It was a novelty that one had to take very seriously. And somehow I managed to survive. Lucky me. I was gifted but my wife as a musician helped me unbelievably - and not just the physical help of being a very good wife. She would come to my rehearsals. "Why you do this? Why you do that? You can't do that!"

Ashkenazy met his wife Thorunn (known by her nickname Dody) when they were both students in Moscow at the Conservatory. In order to marry Ashkenazy, she had to give up her Icelandic citizenship and declare that she wanted to live in the USSR. Both were in the same class studying with the legendary Lev Oborin, famous for having won First Prize in the first Chopin Competition in 1927. Ashkenazy is happy to reminisce. 'I liked him very much,' he says fondly. 'He never made a spectacular career as a pianist and he only made a few recordings, although his teacher Igumnov made even fewer. I played for Igumnov once. He was a dedicated teacher but as a pianist he hardly ever played. I played also for Neuhaus once. I asked him if I could, and he said "Yes of course", so I did and he said "Very good, very gifted, very happy". And that was it! A wonderful man. Inspiring. He was Richter's teacher of course. But he couldn't play. He had a problem with one of his hands.

'Oborin was a great influence on me but his assistant was the one who made me. His name was Zemliansky. "Zemlia" means "earth" in Russian. Boris Zemliansky. He was Oborin's assistant which meant that he took care of Oborin's students. I was introduced to him when I was at the Central Music School in Moscow where I spent 10 years from the age of eight with a wonderful teacher, an Armenian lady called Anaida Sumbatyan. When I went into Oborin's class at the Conservatory, it was Zemliansky who gave me everything that took me to a high level. Not technique – by then I could play almost everything – but



That famous white polo neck: Ashkenazy gives at least 100 concerts every year



All in a day's work: 'All I do, basically, is play the piano and conduct concerts'

musically and temperamentally. He would say "How could you play like this?!" and "What is that? You are gifted. How could you play like that?!" He made me a musician, an artist.'

In 1955, Ashkenazy came second at the International Chopin Competition in Warsaw and won the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels a year later. 'Yes, I won my prizes before [Zemliansky] because I was sort of better than others. OK. Fine. But in the end he is the one who gave me my career. Sumbatyan was wonderful, Oborin was wonderful. But no, Zemliansky was the one.' Famously, Ashkenazy also won joint First Prize with John Ogdon at the second International Tchaikovsky Competition in 1962, having been persuaded by the authorities to enter, much against his will.

Staggering in its range though it undoubtedly is, there are gaps in Ashkenazy's piano discography, some as interesting as they are surprising. He agrees, but insists that he 'wouldn't like to ascribe any meaning to why there is a gap here and a gap there, because it is very difficult to describe how your heart and mind identify with and react to a certain type of music. There's nothing disruptive or negative about this. It's impossible to say – and perhaps better not to try to explain – why certain composers don't appeal. There are pieces by the greatest composers who I admire that don't speak to me, so I leave those alone. How does it happen that you accept some things into your being and not others? I think it depends on your upbringing, on your attitude to the expression in music;



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Daily practice, even on holiday ('There will be a lot of repertoire I probably want to do'): Vladimir Ashkenazy photographed in Lucerne, Switzerland, in 1979

ultimately, it's about what musicians want to say and how they choose to say it.'

One major pianist-composer he has mostly left alone is Liszt. He has, for instance, never recorded the B minor Sonata. 'Well



Humble musician: 'How lucky I am that I can play this unbelievable music, or hear it'

unfortunately', he begins, 'I would love to but ... I orchestrated it. You know when I orchestrated it? When I realised I couldn't play it. There are so many octaves and I'm not good for that type of thing. You have to be a Richter or whoever. I couldn't do it as well as it should be done. There are two passages – and one of them is at the very beginning, damn it! Heaven knows where the orchestration is. I've never heard it! I did the whole thing, right through to the end!' He laughs at the memory.

He no longer plays solo recitals or concertos. 'I feel that I have done so much, and I'm afraid', he says, 'of not doing it on a high-enough level now. Recording is OK because you can play it a few times.' I say how much I admire such clear-sighted objectivity. 'You have to be honest and realistic,' he replies. 'That's what I was taught by my teachers.'

#### 'Yes, there are gaps. There are pieces by the greatest composers who I admire that don't speak to me, so I leave those alone'

In an interview many years ago, Ashkenazy characterised his career as 'sweet slavery'. He reconsiders the phrase. 'Not bad. "Sweet slavery". I could say it again now. Because if you are not a slave to it you cannot do your best. "Sweet" because the music you play is on such a level that you feel privileged to be doing it. You think how could Beethoven or Chopin or whoever do this? It is unbelievable. How lucky I am that I can play it or hear it.'

And how fortunate are we to be able to share in that luck. Happy birthday, maestro! May the next decade bring you more of the same good fortune. **6** 

Decca celebrates Ashkenazy's 80th birthday with two box-sets and six vinyl reissues, to be released between July and September

Ashkenazy's recording of Bach's French Suites is reviewed on page 56; he conducts Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto, with Esther Yoo, reviewed on page 42

# GRAMOPHONE RECORDINGOFTHEMONTH

Malcolm Riley welcomes a impressive and moving disc of three chamber works by Jonathan Dove, with outstanding performances captured in gorgeous recorded sound



Dove

In Damascus<sup>a</sup>. Out of Time. Piano Quintet<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Mark Padmore ten <sup>b</sup>Charles Owen pf

Sacconi Quartet

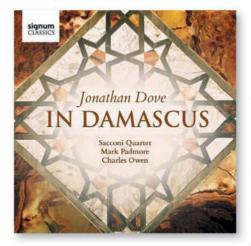
Signum (F) SIGCD487 (73' • DDD • T)

Signum Classics' advocacy of the music of Jonathan Dove continues apace with this superb new chamber/vocal release, recorded in the summer of 2016. It follows the live recording of *There Was a Child*, a passionate choral-orchestral cantata with the combined CBSO forces (Signum, 11/12), and *For an Unknown Soldier* with the London Mozart Players et al (Signum, 2/17), both discs displaying Dove's innate ability to convey – with memorable eloquence – dramatic narratives, a skill honed through the composition of over two dozen operas.

Seldom does a mixed vocal and chamber

programme such as this hang together so perfectly, each successive work tightening the ratchet of intensity towards a final, despairing and pertinently contemporary anguish. It helps that all of the performers are at the top of their communicative powers. The UK-based Sacconi Quartet make light work of Dove's technical challenges, producing a tight and sweet unity of purpose, aided by a close recorded balance. Charles Owen has the happy knack of providing just enough pianistic support when the strings are to the fore and Mark Padmore brings his full emotional range to the disc's largest work.

We begin with the Piano Quintet (2009). This was a Spitalfields Festival commission to celebrate the 80th birthday of a festival patron, George Law. It makes a highly satisfying start to



'The Quintet's opening movement is a tautly driven span, by turns gritty, rapturously lyrical, sparkling and luscious'



Jonathan Dove's music eloquently conveys dramatic narratives

this landmark disc. Composition started in 2008, during a much-needed sabbatical sojourn, and was partially inspired by the rolling hills of Umbria. Cast in three accessible movements, the work's energetic outer branches neatly enfold a slow movement of scintillating warmth and beauty. The opening *Energetic* is a tautly driven span, by turns gritty, rapturously lyrical, sparkling and luscious (think of the melting modulations in John Adams's *Harmonielebre*), with a ruminative development section that grows so naturally and agreeably that one wishes it were even longer.

In the *Very spacious* second movement, pianist Charles Owen makes the most of Dove's various 'bell' effects, sometimes distant, at other moments clangorously strident, when he interrupts the strings' hazy somnolence. A southern-European

languor is abruptly banished by the *Lively* finale. This post-minimalist helter-skelter is a bundle of chunky, metrically challenging fun. *Petrushka* pops up for a very brief glimpse, as does some Bartókian bitonality, before romping home with a breathlessly joyful élan. With this delightful work Dove has refreshed the piano quintet genre; it is worthy of admittance to the canon of great examples by Brahms, Dvořák and Elgar.

The earliest work on the disc, the string quartet *Out of Time* (2001), has been described by its composer as 'a serenade for someone I never met'. A Vanbrugh Quartet commission, this 'pure' piece is something of a mosaic, cast in six short(ish) movements, with little folkish fragments contrasted with snippets of quasiplainsong, all carried through in a pulsing vein. It is full of striking

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Mark Padmore and the Sacconi Quartet with their production team during the recording sessions for In Damascus

contrasts. The opening owes something possibly to Adams's *Shaker Loops*, although Dove conjures up some extraordinarily exquisite filigree textures later on. The third (and shortest) movement, *Stomping*, should have the listener leaping up into the air in terpsichorean delight, while the concluding, wistfully elegiac *Gently moving* somehow suspends time itself.

This last movement sets the scene perfectly for *In Damascus*, a harrowingly vivid setting (in Anne-Marie McManus's translation) of verses from Ali Safar's *A Black Cloud in a Leaden White Sky*, published in *Syria Speaks* in 2014. The texts alone are sufficient to provoke outrage and intense sorrow at the plight of 'a nation where the sun had burned out', but when they are expressed and reinterpreted

through the medium of music the sense of grief is almost too much to bear. Dove gives the string quartet several roles, including accompanist (in the recitatives) and gear-grinding combattant as well as a reflective type of chorus. Traversing a huge emotional range - from the bleakness of Warlock's Curlew, if you will, to the hypnotism of Reich's Different Trains this half-hour-long masterpiece should leave the listener utterly exhausted. There are 10 vocal sections divided by an angrily dissonant instrumental interlude. This work was tailor-made for Mark Padmore, who summons up every iota of his immense interpretative powers to steer us through this reflective testament.

This important release cannot be recommended too highly. Malcolm Riley

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#### **Editor's Choice**

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

# Orchestral



### David Gutman listens to Haitink's latest Mahler Third from Munich:

'The finale has always been a Haitink speciality, plainly spoken and all the more moving for it' ► REVIEW ON PAGE 38



### Andrew Farach-Colton revels in symphonies by Villa-Lobos:

'There's a sense of drama that I find distinctly (and appealingly) cinematic in its evocation of mood and atmosphere' > REVIEW ON PAGE 43

#### **Antheil**

Piano Concerto No 1<sup>a</sup>. A Jazz Symphony<sup>b</sup>.
Capital of the World. Archipelago 'Rhumba'

a<sup>b</sup>Frank Dupree, <sup>b</sup>Adrian Brendle, <sup>b</sup>Uram Kim pfs
Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie, RhinelandPalatinate / Karl-Heinz Steffens
Capriccio (F) C5309 (58' • DDD)



Antheil sometimes plagiarises so unashamedly that listening to his music

with real enjoyment demands a suspension of disbelief. His First Piano Concerto (1922) and A Jazz Symphony (1925), for example, lift ideas straight from Stravinsky's Petrushka and The Rite of Spring respectively. What was Antheil thinking? Why did he feel compelled to insert such jarring appropriations when there's so much actual invention and vitality in both these pieces? Or are these borrowings simply a form of homage to one of his musical heroes?

Thanks in large part to Karl-Heinz Steffens's interpretation, I'd argue that A Jazz Symphony ultimately rewards that suspension of disbelief; that its references to Rite, while blatant, are woven inextricably into the music's narrative structure. Steffens underscores the work's unifying characteristics rather than emphasising its incongruities. The jazz elements may sound stiff and hard-edged in comparison with, say, Maurice Peress's breezy account (Nimbus or MusicMasters, 4/94), but the overall effect conveys a compelling singularity of purpose.

The First Piano Concerto is considerably more diffuse. Some may hear Bartók in the opening minutes (as I do), though in fact Antheil's work predates the Hungarian master's piano concertos by several years. And perhaps that's the problem with Antheil's occasional poaching: one's always wondering what's his and what's not. Certainly the long lyrical passage beginning at 5'40" is evidence enough of Antheil's originality and genius. Frank Dupree's

finely chiselled performance maintains a tighter grip overall than any of his rivals.

Steffens's tenderly expressive reading of a suite from the Latin-inspired ballet *Capital of the World* (1953) lacks the dramatic élan of Robert Irving's pioneering 1954 recording for EMI and offers a more severely truncated version. In the *Archipelago 'Rhumba'* (1935), too, Steffens comes across as relatively straitlaced – at least when heard alongside Barry Kolman's unbuttoned performance with the Slovak State Philharmonic (Centaur). Still, Steffens's uncompromising view of *A Jazz Symphony* – like Storgårds's of the Fourth Symphony (Chandos, 6/17) – proves Antheil worthy of reappraisal. Andrew Farach-Colton

#### JS Bach · Beethoven



JS Bach Die Kunst der Fuge, BWV1080 -Contrapuncti I-IV Beethoven String Quartet No 13, Op 130 (with Grosse Fuge, Op 133) Australian Chamber Orchestra / Richard Tognetti vn

ABC Classics (F) ABC481 4960 (61' • DDD)



Viol consort and not modern chamber orchestra appears to be the model for the

first three contrapuncti of *The Art of Fugue*, however discreetly supported the ACO strings are by pairs of oboes and horns. Separated articulation for the fugue subject brings contrapuntal clarity and a French-style swing to the rhythms but a commensurate loss in gathering intensity, only partially offset by a restrained bass swell and a grand broadening through each final cadence. The arrangement of the Fourth, however, has grown on me: a pizzicato ballet with Swingle Singers-style backing – not as fey or irreverent as it sounds.

With mind thus uncluttered and palate cleansed, Op 130 strikes home – and not as an arrangement but as music that counts. For so forward-thinking a musician, Richard Tognetti makes the surprisingly old-fashioned claim that 'the brutality of

Beethoven's music is more easily facilitated in a large concert hall with more troops'. Some readers may already have their minds made up: there are no gains and only losses in amplifying late Beethoven. I urge them to listen to this. There is some discreet alternation between solo and ensemble voices but nothing so fragmented as Terje Tonnesen's concerto-grosso interventions (BIS, 8/14).

Notwithstanding the ACO's trademark, wiry body of tone, often stripped of vibrato, the portamento in the *Adagio* sections of the opening movement belongs to a tradition from Mahler to Sir Colin Davis. Impassioned, positively heart-rending as the *beklemmt* section of the Cavatina haltingly enters a realm of fresh pathos, it's a time-travelling sort of performance that brought to mind a stroke of genius in Calixto Bieito's production of *Fidelio*, when a quartet descends from the flies to play the 'Heiliger Dankgesang'.

There is no lack of juggernaut bass to launch the *Grosse Fuge* even in comparison with Furtwängler and Klemperer; indeed, the unanimity of the ACO lends Tognetti's direction the same agility and unstoppable momentum as a solo-quartet version. I would be hard-pressed to credit the claim of a live recording (no applause or audience noise from three Sydney concerts, edited together), except for my imprinted memory of their performance in London earlier this year. Unusually, the impact has survived the transfer to disc. It's a formidable achievement. **Peter Quantrill** 

#### **Beaser**

Guitar Concerto<sup>a</sup>. Evening Prayer. Ground O. Notes on a Southern Sky<sup>a</sup> <sup>a</sup>Eliot Fisk atr

Royal Scottish National Orchestra / José Serebrier Linn (© CKD528 (62' • DDD)



The American composer Robert Beaser has the happy knack of writing

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The Australian Chamber Orchestra build an unstoppable momentum under their director Richard Tognetti in Beethoven's Op 130

orchestrally yet idiomatically for solo classical guitar. Just listen to the rippling, toccata-like figurations, driving Latin rhythms and colourful, often highly percussive sonorities of *Notes on a Southern Sky*. Composed for longtime friend Eliot Fisk in 1980 and revised for this premiere recording, it strives to overcome the very limitations it celebrates. But maybe that's indicative of any art that, like Beaser's, celebrates our flawed humanity?

Two other works on this disc are orchestral; they too receive their first recordings. *Ground O* is a moving tribute to the victims of 9/11. *Evening Prayer* was written for the Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra and takes as its starting point the folk song 'Esti dal' as published by Kodály in his *Choruses for Mixed Voices*. The Guitar Concerto, written for Fisk in 2010, also draws its inspiration from folk material – flamenco and bluegrass – as well as the music of the Baroque.

Beaser is an exponent of so-called New Tonalism. He also originally trained as a percussionist. Together with a propensity for motivic development as a unifying principle, these facts make his music accessible, emotionally direct and exciting. All four works have those qualities in abundance. But they are most pronounced in the

Guitar Concerto, a thrilling, expansive composition brimming with terrific ideas. Performed here with Fisk's fearless virtuosity and a clearly inspired RSNO conducted by Beaser advocate Serebrier, it is unquestionably, like Stephen Goss's Guitar Concerto, an important contemporary contribution to the genre. William Yeoman

#### Beethoven · Jost

DVD S

**Beethoven** Symphony No 9, 'Choral', Op 125<sup>a</sup>. Overture, 'Coriolan', Op 62 **Jost** Fanfare. An die Hoffnung<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Camilla Nylund sop <sup>a</sup>Elena Zhidkova *mez* <sup>ab</sup>Klaus Florian Vogt *ten* <sup>a</sup>René Pape *bass* Vienna Singverein; European Union Youth Orchestra Alumni; Tonkünstler Orchestra / Yutaka Sado

Video director Karina Fibich

C Major Entertainment ( ₱ № 740208; ( ₱ २ 740304 (105' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.0, DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • 0 • s) Recorded live at the Grafenegg Festival, August 19, 2016



Set in the grounds of a grand Schloss on the plains of Lower Austria, the Grafenegg Festival does well by itself: a cut above Kenwood, a notch or two below Tanglewood. Opening its 10th-anniversary concert last year, Christian Jost's fanfare runs out of steam some time before the five minutes are up, through no lack of skill or commitment from the nine brass players of the Tonkünstler.

Somewhat unfairly known as Vienna's third orchestra, neither they nor Beethoven are well served by big-band, big-event, seeyou-at-the-double-bar accounts of Coriolan and the inevitable Ninth. Ironically, the Mahler reorchestration – which they recorded for their own label in 2009 would have been more apt for the occasion, as would the incisive direction of their previous music director, Kristjan Järvi. A fine team of soloists is sympathetically balanced, while the Wiener Singverein is served better by the cameras than the microphones. The chorus deliver Schiller's text from memory with some rhetorical flourishes first introduced by Rattle, though Yutaka Sado goes full Bernstein on the final peroration.

Jost was the 2016 composer-in-residence at Grafenegg. In *An die Hoffnung*, he embeds Beethoven's Op 94 song within a stressful 'commentary' for full orchestra. The concept is familiar from works of

# GRAMOPHONE Editor's Choice

Every issue, Gramophone's Editor's Choices highlight the most exciting and important new releases. Explore here a selection of the most thrilling music-making of the past six months



#### 'BACH TO THE FUTURE, VOL 2' Fenella Humphreys

Champs Hill Records
This is part two
of an ambitious
mission by

violinist Fenella Humphreys to expand the solo violin repertoire with some beguiling new works from British composers, in this case Sally Beamish, Peter Maxwell Davies and Adrian Sutton, which can be then programmed alongside Bach's masterpieces. The results, wrote reviewer Charlotte Gardner, 'are excitingly fresh'.

► REVIEWED IN FEBRUARY 2017



#### FI GAR

Cello Concerto
TCHAIKOVSKY
Rococo Variations
Johannes Moser VC
Suisse Romande
Orchestra /
Andrew Manze

Pentatone

We've had a number of very fine Elgar Cello Concerto discs of late, and Johannes Moser's is right up there with them. From the opening, powerful chords onwards, his tone is impressive and the journey a moving one, and the orchestral playing throughout is dramatic and supportive.

► REVIEWED IN MAY 2017



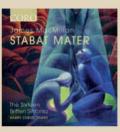
# 'ALL WHO WANDER' Jamie Barton mez Brian Zeger pf Delos A significant

debut recording

from the winner of 2013's Cardiff Singer of the World, featuring Dvořák, Mahler and Sibelius, and one that whets appetites for what may lie ahead from this wonderful voice and impressive talent. 'It's the

and one that whets appetites for what may lie ahead from this wonderful voice and impressive talent. 'It's the sort of instrument you could listen to all day, in any sort of repertoire', wrote *Gramophone*'s critic Hugo Shirley.

► REVIEWED IN FEBRUARY 2017



#### MACMILLAN

Stabat mater
The Sixteen; Britten
Sinfonia / Harry
Christophers
Coro
A highly moving
setting of this

ancient text, one with a timeless relevance and impact – James MacMillan's score embodies Mary's grief and pain with extraordinary power. The Sixteen, under their ever-skilful founder and conductor Harry Christophers, respond with singing of searing intensity and technical finesse.

► REVIEWED IN MAY 2017



#### **MASCAGNI**

Guglielmo Ratcliff Sols; Wexford Festival Opera / Francesco Cilluffo RTÉ Lyric FM 'An essential discovery', wrote

our reviewer Mark Pullinger of this revelatory gem from the 2015 Wexford Festival Opera – an organisation which specialises in digging up, and offering impressive advocacy to, long-forgotten works. Sung and played with real conviction and class, it's one for anyone interested in the music of Mascagni.

► REVIEWED IN FEBRUARY 2017



#### LISZT/TAUSIG

Eine Faust-Symphonie István Lajkó pf Hungaroton A fascinating new discovery for many listeners

I'm sure: a remarkable transcription of Liszt's mighty *Faust Symphony*, played with astonishing skill, prompting *Gramophone* reviewer Patrick Rucker to write that 'with genuine understanding and astonishing confidence, István Lajkó pulls off what surely will be considered a career-defining achievement'.

► REVIEWED IN JUNE 2017

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Leif Segerstam, following a rich tradition of composer-conductors, performs Brahms and his own 289th Symphony

Detlev Glanert, though Jost's work sounds more like Adams's *Harmonielebre* with all the Schoenberg written back in. Stadiumstyle amplification does some frightful things to Klaus Florian Vogt's tenor. Given his manful but partial mastering of a difficult part and rueful smiles at the end, the evening may not be one he would gladly relive, and I feel likewise.

Peter Quantrill

#### **Brahms · Segerstam**

**Brahms** Symphony No 2, Op 73 **Segerstam** Symphony No 289, 'When a Cat Visited'<sup>a</sup> <sup>a</sup>**Nobu Takizawa** *vn* 

Turku Philharmonic Orchestra / Leif Segerstam Alba (F) \_\_\_\_\_\_ ABCD403 (69' • DDD/DSD)



Conductor-composers tackling Brahms symphonies on disc aren't exactly thin

on the ground: think of Bernstein, Furtwängler, Gielen, Klemperer, Kubelík, Walter and Weingartner, to name just a random handful. Of that group Gielen is probably the most creatively progressive and Leif Segerstam follows in his stead, adventuring among novel sonorities with an abundance of imagination. I wish I had the knowledge and experience to place his Symphony No 289 in the context of its 288 predecessors (or indeed its 20-odd successors), but I can't bluff. What I can tell you is that Segerstam claims some parallels with Sibelius's Seventh - a feature No 289 shares with some of his other symphonies inasmuch as it is similar in length to the Sibelius and is also built of various connecting sections. The sound canvas is framed either side by pianos, with a wealth of percussion (including what sounds like a thunder sheet) and a large gathering of standard instruments, the effects conjured ranging from sustained drama to relative delicacy. The work is subtitled When a Cat Visited, meaning notes borne on to the manuscript paper by a wondering moggie. 'One should just follow the track made with the paws', claims Segerstam, 'and at the end enjoy the purring motor which was much better than the electric shakes for massage installed in hospital beds.' I'm impressed. This is obviously no commonplace stray.

However, I wouldn't try using Segerstam's Brahms Second as an aid to vigorous massaging. If you do, you'll be wasting your time. Aside from the uncommonly broad tempo for the first movement (with repeat, 22'05"), why such a conspicuous slamming on of the brakes at 3'30", where Brahms's quasi ritenente ('as if slowing down') is taken as a cue to disrupt the flow? Both here and elsewhere the symphony weighs in far too heavily and one longs for some semblance of light and shade. Indeed, only at the very end of the work does the waking Segerstam dramatically up the pace, as if he's suddenly remembered that we have a train to catch. Alas, it's too late: the train left the platform long ago and in any case we've all fallen asleep. Sorry to have a downer on this but it's ultimately non-competitive, though I'd always be happy to visit another of Segerstam's own symphonies, preferably a group of them with a disc to themselves. Rob Cowan

#### **Bruckner**

Symphony No 1 ('Vienna' version, 1891, ed Nowak). March, WAB96. Three Pieces, WAB97 Luxembourg Philharmonic Orchestra / Gustavo Gimeno



Should a composer's final thoughts be considered definitive? It's a question that

often arises in connection with the works of Bruckner, and in particular the First Symphony, a composition which both musicians and listeners tend to prefer in its earlier 'Linz' incarnation rather than in the revised version Bruckner prepared in Vienna in 1890-91. The Vienna version, incorporating elements of Bruckner's later style, is considered by some as being stylistically incongruous and by most as a totally unnecessary exercise. However, it's an endeavour to which Bruckner dedicated a year of his life and, unlike the frequently played 1889 version of the Third Symphony, is entirely the composer's own work, unsullied by questionable advice from well-meaning friends and admirers.

Given the relatively small number of recordings of the Vienna version in comparison with the Linz, this spirited new version by the Spanish conductor Gustavo Gimeno, a former principal percussionist with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, is therefore a welcome addition to the catalogue. The playing of the Luxembourg Philharmonic, of which Gimeno has been music director since 2015, lacks something in finesse, and the recording has a touch of rawness in climaxes. However, Gimeno's interpretation is pleasingly unaffected and he communicates a genuine affection for the piece, culminating in a particularly exciting performance of the finale.

The March in D minor and Three Pieces for orchestra from 1862 were composed during Bruckner's studies with Kitzler in 1862 and are notable for being his first purely orchestral works. Sometimes known by the collective title of Four Orchestral Pieces, as on this recording, they are pleasant but reveal little of Bruckner's mature style. Indeed, the Psalm 146 from a few years earlier demonstrates a considerably greater degree of imagination and individuality. However, the pieces are recorded only very occasionally and the fine performances on this disc are a welcome bonus. **Christian Hoskins** 

#### Bruckner

Symphony No 4 (1878/80 version, ed Haas)
Staatskapelle Dresden / Christian Thielemann
Profil © PH16064 (73' • DDD)
Recorded live at the Semperoper, Dresden,
May 17, 2015

#### Bruckner

Symphony No 3 (1877 version, ed Nowak)

Staatskapelle Dresden / Christian Thielemann

Video director Elisabeth Malzer

C Major Entertainment (F) 2027 740808;

(F) 2027 740904 (68' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.0, DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • 0)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie, Munich,

September 2 & 3, 2016





What a difference six days makes. That's the amount of time between Thielemann's performance of Bruckner's Fourth Symphony on this Profil CD and the one with the same orchestra already available on a C Major DVD/Blu-ray. The later video performance, made during a visit to Baden-Baden, has an overall timing within two seconds of the one recorded in Dresden, although this masks the fact that the latter is about 80 seconds slower across the first two movements and a similar amount of time swifter in the final two movements. More significant than this, however, is the fact that the audio version is a far more impressive performance.

My initial reaction was to question whether I previously underrated the video version but a comparison of the two versions side-by-side, as well as some blind listening of other recent recordings, confirmed the superiority of the new release. Thielemann's interpretation, spacious and unaffected, has a commanding strength and inner purpose, and the playing of the Dresden Staatskapelle seems even more cultivated than on the video recording. The performance of the Andante in particular conjures a magical landscape of mists and shadows, and Thielemann really knows how to power those extended Brucknerian climaxes in the finale. The excellent recording captures the occasional cough in quiet passages but the audience is generally very well behaved; the sudden outbreak of applause in the silence that follows the performance is almost startling.

The video release of the Third Symphony, Thielemann's first recording of this work, is similarly impressive. Thielemann performs the 1877 edition, which loses the Wagner quotations and some of the discursiveness of the 1873 score without suffering the cuts that trouble many listeners in the finale of the 1889 version. This version also includes the short coda to the Scherzo, which Bruckner added in 1878 and subsequently crossed out.

Thielemann's approach to tempos is slightly more flexible than in the Fourth Symphony, although his choices are judiciously handled and do not detract from the overall sense of line. The first movement has grandeur and magnificence, essential qualities in this music, while the *Adagio* is wonderfully moving, especially in

the closing moments. The Scherzo has a powerful rhythmic charge, with a superbly characterised Trio, followed by a near-ideal performance of the multifaceted finale. As in the Fourth Symphony, the orchestral playing is in class of its own, superbly balance and exquisitely articulated.

The video shows Thielemann leading the performance without a score, and more animated and perspiring than we sometimes see him. Elisabeth Malzer's video direction is relatively unimaginative, which is not necessarily a bad thing, although occasionally I felt there could be a better match between the instruments seen on the screen and the ones heard in the speakers. Nevertheless, with its excellent sound and video quality, this is one of the most recommendable versions of the 1877 Third available in any medium.

#### Christian Hoskins

Symphony No 4 – selected comparison:

Dresden Staatskapelle, Thielemann

(2/17) (CMAJ) № 732508, № 732604

#### Bruckner

Symphony No 9 (with finale cptd Schaller)

Philharmonie Festiva / Gerd Schaller

Profil (© 2) PH16089 (85' • DDD)

Recorded live at Ebrach Abbey, Bavaria, July 2016



Recent advances in understanding of Bruckner's work on the unfinished finale

of his Ninth Symphony, including the recognition that the score was much closer to completion than previously thought, have spurred a remarkable series of new performing editions over the past decade. These include Sébastien Letocart's version of 2008, revised editions by William Carragan in 2010 and Samale/Mazzuca/Phillips/Cohrs (SMPC) in 2012, and now a version by the conductor Gerd Schaller, who previously recorded the Carragan completion in 2010 as part of his complete Bruckner cycle.

Schaller's contribution is no mere tweak of one of the existing versions from a performance perspective but a new attempt to reconstruct the finale based on a study of the available drafts and sketches. In addition to filling out the missing sections of the score and creating a coda, Schaller also provides a more detailed orchestral texture than usual. A notable example is the warm secondary theme of the *Gesangperiode* (second subject group) at 3'16", which is here given to strings, brass and woodwinds as opposed to the string-dominated scoring of the published manuscript fragments and

the other performing versions. The result sounds rather Wagnerian at times, the usual reminiscence of the 'magic sleep' motif in the recapitulation (15'23") being joined by additional hints of *The Ring*, including a quotation of the Wanderer's leitmotif from *Siegfried* at 8'30".

The most significant challenge for anyone completing the finale is creating a coda from the available sketches and secondary sources about Bruckner's intentions. In this respect, the 2012 SMPC version (recorded by Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic) is an extraordinary achievement, offering a stirring conclusion to the symphony while managing to sound thoroughly Brucknerian. Schaller's conception, drawing on themes from earlier works including the finale of the Fourth Symphony and the cantata Helgoland, doesn't strike me as being on the same level but it succeeds in bringing a sense of resolution to the close of the movement.

Schaller's interpretation of the symphony, stately and non-interventionist, is similar in conception to his earlier recording featuring the Carragan finale, although the Adagio is slightly swifter this time around. I would have preferred slightly more intensity in the great climaxes of the first and third movements, although it could be argued that the fourmovement version of the symphony is best served by a degree of restraint earlier on, and there's no lack of conviction in the performance of the finale. In the absence of a critical report on the sources and methodology used to create the new finale (the CD booklet provides only a high-level overview), it's difficult to judge the veracity of Schaller's approach; but it's a serious contribution that deserves to be heard by all interested Brucknerians.

#### Christian Hoskins

Symphony No 9 with finale – selected comparison: BPO, Rattle (8/12) (EMI/WARN) 952969-2

#### **Copland**

Symphony No 3. Three Latin American Sketches

Detroit Symphony Orchestra / Leonard Slatkin

Naxos American Classics ® 8 559844 (55' • DDD)



Copland described his Third Symphony (1946) as an 'end-ofwar piece – intended

to reflect the euphoric spirit of the country at the time'. Bernstein brilliantly conveyed this feeling of hard-won jubilation in his celebrated 1966 recording with the New York Philharmonic (now on Sony), and again, 20 years later, on his broader but still electric account for DG.

Leonard Slatkin took a more relaxed, picturesque view in 1989 with the Saint Louis Symphony (RCA), substituting a kind of pastoral lyricism for Bernstein's grit. His tempos are even more spacious on this new Naxos recording from Detroit. Indeed, the first movement feels quite lethargic at times, giving the music an oddly elegiac character. And the opening minutes of the scherzo-like second movement are also frustratingly sluggish. Surely the jittery passage beginning at 2'14" is meant to suggest giddiness; here it is merely poised. Then, suddenly, around 4'30", the interpretation clicks: the orchestra's playing is so shapely, so warmly consolatory, it's difficult not to be won over. And when the boisterous opening section returns, there's more energy.

Slatkin's tempo for the *Andantino quasi allegretto* feels more like an *adagio* á la Shostakovich and paints rather too desolate a landscape for my liking. Here again, however, Slatkin's attention to colouristic detail, and the expressive intensity of the Detroit Symphony's playing, are riveting. The DSO strings sound more secure than their SLSO counterparts and Naxos's engineering is unquestionably superior

(listen, for instance, to the glistening notes of the harp at 6'17" in the finale). I only wish Slatkin had as tight a grip on the opening movement as he does in the last, which is measured but resolute.

Why we never hear the delightful *Three Latin American Sketches* is a mystery. And if Slatkin's relaxed reading doesn't quite capture the snap and 'sizzle' Copland said he had in mind, it's still a charmer.

#### Andrew Farach-Colton

Symphony No 3 - selected comparisons: New York PO, Bernstein (11/86) (DG) → 419 170-2GH St Louis SO, Slatkin (2/91) (RCA) RD60149 New York PO, Bernstein (SONY) SMK63155

#### Dean · Francesconi



Dean Dramatis personae
Francesconi Hard Pace
Håkan Hardenberger tpt Gothenburg
Symphony Orchestra / John Storgårds
BIS 🕞 🕮 BIS2067 (59' • DDD/DSD)



I can't find any evidence to corroborate the booklet note's

suggestion that Brett Dean's trumpet concerto *Dramatis personae* is a preparatory work for the opera *Hamlet*, which opened two weeks after this disc landed on my desk. But the idea is a fertile one nonetheless. Not only is Dean's piece as theatrical as its title would suggest, it also has a compelling downwards trajectory right from the ominous, Dohnányi-like bass melody that takes over soon after the concerto has pattered its way into being, rather like Dean's Viola Concerto does.

The first movement, 'Fall of a Superhero', maintains a rhythmic groove pretty much throughout its 13-minute span. Hardenberger's trumpet moans, whines and cries with uncannily human qualities in the following 'Soliloquy' and



seems haunted by responsibilities it doesn't want in the final 'The Accidental Revolutionary'. *Hamlet* undertones there, for sure. But just as interesting is how the trumpet – the lonely prince or not – pursues or abandons flawed relationships with dramatis personae from the orchestra.

Luca Francesconi's concerto Hard Pace couldn't be more different but is just as special, perhaps even more so. The composer himself talks in the booklet about Miles Davis, which rings alarm bells, but it needn't: his love for Davis delivers the very opposite of musical tokenism but, instead, extreme care with Francesconi's own sort of poetry, in which the trumpet dare only speak, during some exquisite passages, in isolated notes like faltering lines drawn on a wall. Textures are spare, harmonies are rich, tension is high - not least as the trumpet is pressured into a treacherous ascent at the end of the first movement (the mirror image of Dean's fallen hero). The piece's distilled atmosphere and harmonic calligraphy reminds me of Henze's Requiem, but it might just be that I've not heard trumpet-playing like it since Hardenbeger's recording of that piece. With Storgårds and the GSO, it's a dream team. Andrew Mellor

#### Dvořák · Bloch

Bloch Schelomo Dvořák Silent Woods, Op 68 No 5 B182. Cello Concerto, Op 104 B191 Marc Coppey VC Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin / Kirill Karabits

Audite (F) AUDITE97 734 (69' • DDD)



While not wishing to mislead with excessive praise, Marc Coppey's 2016 account of the

Dvořák Concerto more reminded me of Emanuel Feuermann's various recordings than any others that I've heard in recent years, and by that I mean Feuermann as a mellow-toned 26-year-old (under Michael Taube) and on richer, later broadcast recordings with Leon Barzin and Hans Lange conducting. Then again, I've always been smitten with Feuermann's approach to the work, his seamless, full tone, quietly expressive phrasing, strength of projection and evenly deployed vibrato.

Coppey's first entry (3'28") suggests unflappable confidence and when the music takes flight soon afterwards he employs a keen-edged staccato while retaining his characteristic rich body of tone. Also, Coppey's approach exploits the instrument's entire range with ease: the lovely second subject is as gently seductive

as the more assertive passages are bracing. Try the perfect diminuendo at 1'36" into the Adagio: this sort of playing has me reaching for the rewind facility just for the pleasure of enjoying it a second or third time. Other cellists, most notably Casals and Fournier weave their own magic but, as of yet, their younger equivalents have not appeared. Those of Coppey's rivals who have justifiable claims on our attentions include the impassioned and tonally varied Alisa Weilerstein but there is something about Coppey's aching restraint (if that doesn't seem too contradictory a term) that even after such a brief period of acquaintance has had me return to his version on a number of occasions. So far the magic hasn't abated.

Bloch's Schelomo was another Feuermann staple but although Coppey again hits target, he's pipped to the post, in the stereo field at least, by the superb Feuermann pupil George Neikrug, who, like his master, is granted an incendiary account of the orchestral score under Leopold Stokowski. Kirill Karabits and his Berlin forces, good as they are (and of course better recorded), don't quite match that level of intensity, whereas they provide sensitive and detailed accounts of the two Dvořák scores -Silent Woods is no less effective than the concerto - which adds further credence to an extremely strong recommendation. Rob Cowan

#### Falla

Noches en los jardines de España<sup>a</sup>. El sombrero de tres picos<sup>b</sup>. La vida breve - Interlude and Dance. El Amor brujo - Ritual Fire Dance bSophie Harmsen mez aMari Kodama pf Suisse Romande Orchestra / Kazuki Yamada Pentatone (F). PTC5186 598 (73' • DDD/DSD)



The Suisse Romande Orchestra (OSR) famously recorded *El sombrero de tres* 

picos and the Interlude and Dance from La vida breve with Ernest Ansermet (who conducted El sombrero's premiere) in 1961, considered a classic version in its day, though opinions have differed about it since. As with his previous Roussel/ Debussy disc (A/16), Kazuki Yamada, the OSR's current principal guest conductor, is consequently revisiting the orchestra's defining repertory to some extent in this issue, which preserves the original coupling but now adds Noches en los

jardines de España and the familiar extract from El Amor brujo into the mix. The pairing of El sombrero with Noches also effectively throws down a challenge to Juanjo Mena's Falla disc in Chandos's Música de España series.

As one might expect, the OSR perform both works with great refinement and play with virtuoso understatement throughout. Yamada's nuanced approach suits Noches uncommonly well. Falla's finegrained shifts in colour and sonority are immaculately judged, textures clean yet sensual. The influence of early Stravinsky, Firebird in particular, is well to the fore in the string tremolandos at the start: later, the Debussian brass and woodwind phrases unfurl with exquisite finesse. Pianist Mari Kodama judiciously combines delicacy with weight, compelling attention without quite attaining Alicia de Larrocha's poetic lyricism (with Frühbeck de Burgos and the LPO on Decca) or the darker, grander fire of Javier Perianes in his fine performance with the BBC Symphony and Josep Pons for Harmonia Mundi.

Many of the same qualities are discernible in El sombrero, though they serve the work less well. Sensuality tips into ribaldry in the ballet's narrative and there are moments when Yamada's refinement renders things on occasion too genteel. The Corregidor's music, all 18th-century pastiche and impertinent bassoon solos, is nicely done. But rhythmic definition slips a bit in the Miller's all-important Farruca, which needs more aggression and sexuality than it gets here. Given that Yamada builds steadily through the Second Act towards genuine elation in the final Jota, one wonders if the underemphasis is deliberate; but it doesn't quite work, if so. Mena's performance has an altogether sharper dramatic focus, though his comparatively detached way with Noches -Jean-Efflam Bavouzet is his coolly lucid soloist - may not be to everyone's taste. Mena's choice of the rarely played Homenajes as the filler just tips the balance in the Chandos disc's favour, however. On the Pentatone disc, the Vida breve extracts could do with a bit more turmoil and élan, though the 'Ritual Fire Dance' is splendid in its sinister relentlessness and uneasy sense of wonder.

#### Tim Ashley

Noches en los jardines de España – selected comparisons: Larrocha, LPO, Frühbeck de Burgos (6/84<sup>R</sup>) (DECC) 466 128-2DF2 Perianes, BBC SO, Pons (1/12) (HARM) HMC90 2099 Noches, El sombrero de tres picos – selected comparison: Bavouzet, BBC PO, Mena (5/12) (CHAN) CHAN10694

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Refinement and virtuoso understatement: conductor Kazuki Yamada with pianist Mari Kodama, recording Manuel de Falla for Pentatone

#### Haydn

Symphonies, Vol 23'
Symphonies - No 6, 'Le matin'a; No 7, 'Le midi'a; No 8, 'Le soir'a; No 35<sup>b</sup>; No 46<sup>b</sup>; No 51<sup>b</sup>
Heidelberg Symphony Orchestra /

aThomas Fey, bBenjamin Spillner vn
Hänssler Classic (M) ② HC16088 (148' • DDD)



Rumours have abounded online that this could be the last disc in Thomas Fey's

Haydn symphony cycle. There are two reasons for this. In a horrific turn of events, Fey himself appears to have been involved in an accident and rendered physically unable to conduct for the time being; concertmaster Benjamin Spillner stepped in to record the second disc. Meanwhile, the old, old story of falling revenues that appears to curse Haydn cycles over and over again means that new sponsors must to be found to enable the series to continue. Günter Hänssler assures me, however, that in due course the remaining 'London' Symphonies will appear and then a further decision will be taken on the future of this always compelling, often thought-provoking and occasionally

frustrating cycle. By my reckoning, 63 symphonies are now on the market, and the 'London' Symphonies will take that figure over the two-thirds mark. Haydnistas everywhere will pray to their house gods that Fey recovers and that the cycle comes to fruition in due course.

The 'Times of Day' Symphonies, the last to be recorded with Fey on the podium, stand up well against other favourite recordings of these early Esterházy works, played as true chamber music, a harpsichord offering subtle support here and there. *Allegros* bustle agreeably and minuets are taken slowly enough for all those solos, from flute to bassoon and double bass – and horns to the fore – to display the tonal allure of these champions league players in a more generous than usual acoustic.

The *Sturm und Drang* symphonies fare just as well. No 35 is a charming work that still displays old-fashioned features such as the 'dry' strings-only slow movement; No 46 is the experimental B major work, which here matches the recent recording by Il Giardino Armonico in the aplomb with which all its awkwardnesses are surmounted. No 51 is a showcase for horns playing in both extremes of the instrument's range (and not shying away from those very extremes). These are

wholly impressive recordings on modern instruments displaying period manners and, if the gaps in the cycle are filled in as time goes by, a more than viable alternative to the gradually unfolding period-instrument cycle on Alpha. David Threasher

Symphonies Nos 6-8 – selected comparisons: Freiburg Baroque Orch (6/02) (HARM) HMC90 1767 Petite Bande, S Kuijken (3/13) (ACCE) ACC24272 Symphony No 46 – selected comparison: Giardino Armonico, Antonini (7/15) (ALPH) ALPHA671

#### Holzbauer · Mozart · Pleyel

'Sinfonia concertante'

Holzbauer Sinfonia concertante for Violin, Viola and Cello Mozart Sinfonia concertante for Winds, K297*b* (reconstr Levin) Pleyel Sinfonia concertante. B113

Basel Chamber Orchestra /
Umberto Benedetti Michelangeli
Sony Classical (F) 88985 41178-2 (67' • DDD)



The *sinfonia concertante* was all the rage in the late 18th century, above all in Paris and

Mannheim, whose crack orchestras inspired composers to turn out multiple concertos by the bushel. Mozart, en route for Paris, met Ignaz Holzbauer in Mannheim in 1777 and in a letter to his father pronounced his music 'very fine' – no mean compliment from someone who rarely went overboard about fellow composers. Holzbauer's Sinfonia concertante for violin, viola and cello, which Mozart could have heard, is mellifluous, concise and deftly crafted for the solo trio. Yet while enjoyable up to a point, it lacks any melodic or harmonic features to make you sit up. Memorable tunes are also at a premium in the amply scaled, lavishly scored Concertante by Haydn's pupil Ignaz Pleyel, whose success in the 1792 London season spurred Haydn to write his own Sinfonia concertante. Trading on ear-tickling colouristic effects, this is urbanely agreeable music, with a plaintive, siciliano-style Adagio and a mildly entertaining variation finale that gives each soloist a star turn. The opening movement is replete with Haydnesque plunges to remote keys. Unlike Haydn's, though, Pleyel's music can chatter and trickle rather aimlessly, too often relying on the sequential repetition of stereotyped patterns.

We'll probably never know how much genuine Mozart there is in the problematic wind Sinfonia concertante, K297b, which has survived only in a highly dubious 19th-century arrangement. The harmonic rhythm of the suave opening Allegro is uncharacteristically leisurely for Mozart, and the theme-and-variation finale can easily outstay its welcome. Yet it's still the most engaging of the three works here, all the more so in the reconstruction by scholar-pianist Robert Levin which restores the scoring of Mozart's lost original (flute, oboe, bassoon, horn), distributes the material ingeniously between the instruments (with a nod to the piano-andwind Quintet, K452) and rewrites the tuttis in more convincingly Mozartian style.

While I slightly missed the tangier, more rustic period sonorities of the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra in the Mozart (Harmonia Mundi, 6/06), the euphonious Basel soloists blend and dovetail sensitively in all three works, and reveal plenty of individual personality. The Holzbauer is enlivened by a discreetly inventive fortepiano continuo; and among the excellent assorted soloists in the Plevel. Julia Schröder deserves an accolade for her high-wire acts in the finale. Horn and bassoon spin eloquent cantabile lines in the Mozart Adagio and palpably relish their cavorting and pirouetting in the finale, launched at a refreshingly bouncy tempo. I also enjoyed the spontaneous-sounding touches of ornamentation, and oboist Matthias Arter's cadenzas, with their witty

Mozartian cross-references. All the while the Basel Chamber Orchestra, recorded in a glowing church acoustic, play with their customary polish and élan. Richard Wigmore

#### **Karłowicz**

Violin Concerto, Op 8<sup>a</sup>. Lithuanian Rhapsody, Op 11. The Sorrowful Tale, Op 13 <sup>a</sup>Bartłomiej Nizioł *Vri* Mieczysław Karłowicz Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra, Szczecin / Łukasz Borowicz

Dux (F) DUX1377 (60' • DDD)



Mieczysław Karłowicz's Violin Concerto of 1902 stands at the threshold

of the half a dozen Impressionist-Romantic tone poems by which his remarkable talent (cut off in its prime by an avalanche while skiing in the Tatra mountains) is remembered. As such it occupies a worthy place beside numerous worthy post-Bruchand-Tchaikovsky contemporaries, being warm and charming in tone, idiomatically written and solidly structured, but by comparison with the likes of Sibelius or Elgar almost wholly lacking in individuality. The booklet essay's description of the concerto as 'truly visionary' is surely a bit of a stretch. Still, it receives a sympathetic and confident performance at the hands of Bartłomiej Nizioł.

Six years on and we are in a different world. Beginning and ending in Stygian gloom, *The Sorrowful Tale* depicts the last moments of a man about to commit suicide. No contrived redemption à la Strauss, and towards the end the Szczecin Philharmonic recording even reinstates the gunshot that Karłowicz later replaced with a tom-tom: as if the narrative were not already explicit enough.

Melancholy runs through the *Lithuanian Rhapsody* too. 'I tried to pour into it all the grief, sadness and eternal chains of this people whose songs filled my childhood', Karłowicz related; and in this he surely succeeded. Even so, I couldn't help craving one of the more brazen of his symphonic poems to complete the disc in its stead.

Dux already has serviceable recordings of the tone poems by the Silesian Philharmonic in its catalogue. These new ones are a degree more richly recorded and characterfully played, but still no match for the tautness and opulence of the BBC Philharmonic on Chandos. As for the Concerto, Tasmin Little on Hyperion is equally persuasive; and for collectors who already have the tone poems, her coupling of Moszkowski might be the tiebreaker. David Fanning

Violin Concerto – selected comparison: Little, BBC Scottish SO, Brabbins (HYPE) CDA67389 Lithuanian Rhapsody – selected comparison: BBC PO, Tortelier (10/02) (CHAN) CHAN9986 The Sorrowful Tale – selected comparison: BBC PO, Noseda (1/06) (CHAN) CHAN10298

#### **Mahler**

Symphony No 3

Gerhild Romberger contr Augsburg Cathedral Boys' Choir; Bavarian Radio Women's Choir and Symphony Orchestra / Bernard Haitink BR-Klassik ( 2 100149 (101' • DDD • T ) Recorded live at the Philharmonie im Gasteig, Munich, June 15-17, 2016



It is only 10 years since Bernard Haitink launched the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's

in-house label with a not dissimilar account of this very work. Like Iván Fischer, a recent rival whose sparky studio recording employs some overlapping personnel, Bernard Haitink knows how to pace Mahler's lengthiest piece, albeit to rather different effect. The contrast is most marked in the colossal opening movement where surface incident is comparatively muted in Munich, the intention presumably to make it convince as an abstract structure. In what must be the conductor's fifth (or is it sixth?) commercial recording, his Bavarian Radio forces boast the kind of assurance and fine tuning unavailable anywhere on the planet when he first taped the work in mid-1960s Amsterdam. That said, if this is music 'about' the seasonal reawakening of the material world, there are plainly losses as well as gains. Haitink's latter-day musicmaking can be construed as blessedly devoid of egocentricity or merely somewhat dour. Abbado enthusiasts will detect a certain heaviness, Bernstein cultists a dearth of Mahlerian schmaltz.

While the performance feels most engaged when the music is in repose, the inner movements are more than adequately eloquent. The excellent posthorn solos in the third are credited to Martin Angerer, not as distanced as he might have been in the studio. Gerhild Romberger has an old-fashioned contralto-ish timbre in the Nietzsche setting, where Haitink isn't one to make a fashionable meal of the woodwind's binaufziehen ('pull up') markings. Despite relatively close scrutiny, the choirs sound lovely in the fifth movement and the finale has always been a Haitink speciality, plainly spoken and all the more moving for it. The majestic

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conclusion is presented without undue bombast yet there's none of the apologetic reserve that seems to afflict recent rivals (even if you can tell it has been a long night for the players).

This is a live recording with audience noise and concluding applause suppressed. Heard in isolation the sound engineering comes across as full and true although the sonic superiority of Fischer on Channel Classics is readily apparent in comparative listening. David Gutman

Selected comparisons:

New York PO, Bernstein (12/62<sup>R</sup>) (SONY) 88697 94333-2 Concertgebouw Orch, Haitink

(11/94) (PHIL) 442 050-2PB10 Chicago SO, Haitink (9/07) (CSOR) CSOR901701 Budapest Fest Orch, Fischer, (6/17) (CHNN) CCSSA38817 Lucerne Fest Orch, Abbado

(MEDI) 205 6338; 205 6334

#### **Mahler**

Symphony No 5

Minnesota Orchestra / Osmo Vänskä
BIS (E) 
BIS2226 (76' • DDD/DSD)



Robert von Bahr's label must be one of the few to have ducked the release of a Mahler cycle (at least until now) and, if the big pluses of this initial instalment are primarily sonic, BIS's SACD format is certain to wow audiophiles. Even heard through two channels the recording is spacious yet precise and, true to form, the dynamic range is vast, complementing Osmo Vänskä's partiality for musicmaking on the threshold of audibility. Still, his band's rather lean sonority for me remains a limiting factor in this repertoire, which is not to deny that its sharply etched responsiveness lends novel clarity to many passages.

The Fifth Symphony launches the series more successfully than listeners with memories of the same team's 2006 BBC Proms performance might have expected. The orchestral playing is crisper, the conductor's clinical tendencies tempered by an understanding that emotional extremism is an essential part of Mahler's idiom even if it need not be indulged. Determined to avoid histrionics, Vänskä often gives the music as much space and focus as Leonard Bernstein. Only the central Scherzo is markedly swifter towards the close, including some driven passages which do not sound entirely natural. The biggest surprise will be the old-school tempo for the Adagietto. It is the American conductor who moves

the music forwards more and to predictably emotive effect, albeit with a less obsessive interest in ethereally hushed dynamics. The delicate, contained, determinedly 'classical' rondo finale may be the most controversial part of the Minnesota rethink. It would be unfair to condemn it for gathering insufficient power and momentum when the chorale's climactic reappearance, purged of bluster, becomes just one incident in a rewarding if slightly subdued sequence of generic transformations.

While some will prefer to look elsewhere for the customary Mahlerian blend of anguish, heft and geniality, there's more going on here than a thoughtful seating plan and state-of-the-art production. I just can't predict whether the angular snap of those familiar opening tattoos will strike you as resilient or merely rigid!

#### **David Gutman**

Selected comparison:

VPO, Bernstein (8/88R) (DG) 477 6334

▶ See The Musician and the Score on page 44

#### Mendelssohn

Symphonies - No 3, 'Scottish', Op 56; No 5, 'Reformation, Op 107' **Potsdam Chamber Academy / Antonello Manacorda** Sony Classical ® 88985 43322-2 (70' • DDD)

### MALMÖ CHAMBER MUSIC



SEPTEMBER 19th-23rd 2017

#### Beginnings and endings

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The Potsdamers' disc of Mendelssohn's Symphonies Nos 1 and 4 (10/16) left Peter

Quantrill unexcited. My own reactions to its successor were more positive, especially in the case of the Reformation, once branded dry and 'academic' and virtually disowned by the composer. It's been a good decade for the symphony, with bracing versions by, inter alios, Andrew Litton, likewise paired with the Scottish (BIS, 6/10), Edward Gardner (Chandos, 2/14), Thomas Zehetmair (MDG, 4/14) and the everprovocative Thomas Fey (Hänssler Classic). Antonello Manacorda and his spruce Potsdam band (modern instruments played with historical awareness) offer a comparably lithe, up-tempo performance, with vivid wind detailing and clearly etched textures, not least in the finale's strenuous fugal bouts. Of stiffness and pomposity there is ne'er a trace.

After a nobly built introduction, culminating in a shimmering, truly pianissimo 'Dresden Amen', the first movement has an urgent, fiery sweep, balancing trenchancy with the lyrical impetus that is a Mendelssohnian sine qua non. And the violins' cussed antiphonal jousting in the development confirms that divisi violins are as crucial in this symphony as they are in Beethoven's Seventh. At a swift though never hectic-sounding tempo, the Scherzo darts and flickers rather than ambles - a reminder that the Reformation Symphony was conceived by a 20-year-old who three years earlier had created the miraculous A Midsummer Night's Dream Overture, Unlike his rivals, Manacorda includes the flute-led woodwind cadenza at the start of the finale which Mendelssohn deleted from his autograph. I'm glad to have heard it, especially when played as sensitively as here, but, as the composer doubtless felt, it does rather diminish the effect of the solo flute chorale that follows.

I'd certainly rank this fresh and exhilarating *Reformation* with the recent versions listed above. The performance of the *Scottish* is in similar vein, and very enjoyable it is. From the gaunt, winddominated opening, Manacorda is alert to the symphony's distinctive, often abrasive sound world (internal balances are spoton), and, again, builds tension over long paragraphs. While I'd have liked a more fluid pulse in the first movement and, especially, the *Adagio*, Manacorda takes note of Mendelssohn's swift metronome markings and draws brilliant playing from

his orchestra, not least the all-important first clarinet. The scherzo is a tour de force of mercurial delicacy (plenty of horn mischief here, too), while the A major coda whoops and blazes as it should. If your taste is for a more poetic, Romantically flexible Scottish, go for Harnoncourt (Warner, 5/92), Dohnányi (Decca, 12/87) or the vintage Maag (Decca, 7/95). But for a superbly played and recorded performance in the modern mould, with many individual felicities, Manacorda and his band stand up well alongside Andrew Litton, Andrew Manze (Pentatone) and, on period instruments, Pablo Heras-Casado (Harmonia Mundi, 3/16): another confirmation that on disc, at least, Mendelssohn lovers have never had it so good. Richard Wigmore

#### Nyman

Symphonies - No 2; No 5
The World Orchestra / Josep Vicent
MN Records © MNRCD134 (50' • DDD)



Eyebrows were raised in 2014 when Michael Nyman declared his aim during the next

few years to produce not just a single symphony but a projected cycle of 17. Other than Philip Glass, whose 11 symphonies have met with mixed responses, few minimalist composers have ventured into a form whose tonal push-and-pull seems antithetical to music based on repetition, circular patterns and harmonic stasis.

These are perhaps symphonies more in the spirit of Edmund Rubbra than, say, Havergal Brian. Evoking the original meaning of the word, Nyman draws upon, develops and reworks music from previous material, making his work quite literally 'sound together'. It would be misleading, though, to view these works as mere exercises in recycling. The symphony also offers Nyman a wider and more diverse expressive canvas on which to operate, as displayed in the two works featured here. Symphony No 5, composed in 2013, is dark and brooding. The first movement gradually introduces a complex series of interlocking lines over a repeating ninenote pattern, while the third movement's ominous-sounding chaconne bass, astringent dissonances and fatalistic tone are as far removed from generic Nyman as one is likely to hear. A rumbustious concluding movement provides a fitting close, exuding the kind of swagger associated with the composer's earlier style. In contrast, Symphony No 2, composed in 2014, is more playful. It starts off by echoing the kind of lyricism heard on the composer's soundtrack *The End of the Affair*, while sweet harmonies also accompany the second movement. A scherzo-like third eventually gives way to a rhythmically propulsive finale, which encapsulates the symphony's shadows-and-light tone by reintroducing a dancelike melody first heard in the opening movement. It may be a little premature to describe Nyman as a 'symphonist for all seasons', but the signs are already very positive. **Pwyll ap Sión** 

#### **Potter**

'The Romantic Piano Concerto, Vol 72'
Piano Concertos - No 2; No 4.
Variazioni di bravura on a Theme by Rossini
Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra /
Howard Shelley pf

Hyperion (F) CDA68151 (74' • DDD)



This is only the second CD ever devoted to Cipriani Potter, though he was a

significant and distinguished figure during his lifetime (1792-1871), respected by Beethoven and praised by Wagner, no less. He was also, if the works here are anything to go by, a top-flight virtuoso.

These two (of his three extant and unpublished) piano concertos have been gathering dust in the archives of the Philharmonic Society in the British Library for over 180 years (they were composed respectively in 1832 and 1835). Do they merit the substantial time, cost and labour it has taken to let them see the light of day? At first, I was uncertain. But not now. On a first hearing, the thematic material seemed undistinguished, the internal structure of each movement unclear, and the pianowriting sounded like Mendelssohn on steroids. What impressed most immediately – and more than any other element - was Howard Shelley's playing. Not for the first time, I was lost in admiration by his dazzling dispatch of the fantastically demanding writing in the outer movements of both concertos, the aural equivalent of someone mistakenly igniting a box of fireworks. Add to that his simultaneous and complete control of his fine Tasmanian players. I cannot think of another musician who is Shelley's equal in this dual role.

With each subsequent hearing (I have listened to the disc five times now) my enjoyment has increased exponentially. There are some lovely lyrical ideas (the

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Vladimir Ashkenazy with violinist Esther Yoo, whose dark, aristocratic tone is treasurable - see the review of their Tchaikovsky on page 42

second subject of No 2's first movement, for instance) and a string of others that are engagingly capricious. I am already rather fond of them. They certainly make fascinating and worthwhile additions to the Hyperion series.

As for the *Rossini* Variations (six of them, brief, hyperactive, composed in 1829 and based, so Jeremy Dibble tells us in his customarily exemplary booklet, on a theme from *Mathilde di Shabran*), they provide an entertaining 15 minutes of scintillating period fluff. The recording (engineer Veronika Vincze and producer Ben Connellan) is out of the top drawer. I'd like to hear a lot more of Cipriani Potter. Jeremy Nicholas

#### **Prokofiev**

Piano Concertos<sup>a</sup> - No 1, Op 10; No 3, Op 26. Overture on Hebrew Themes, Op 34*bis* <sup>a</sup>Simon Trpčeski *pf* Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra / Vasily Petrenko Onyx ® ONYX4140 (52' • DDD)



Trpčeski and Petrenko are a tried-and-tested team, and their Prokofiev recordings are every bit as polished and satisfying as I remember from live accounts (of the Third Concerto) in Liverpool's Philharmonic Hall. The recorded balance is also extremely well judged, giving the piano due prominence but never at the expense of the colours and shapes Petrenko draws from his responsive orchestra.

These are above all thoroughly musical accounts, beautifully rehearsed so that orchestra and piano can have an equal share in the action. The First Concerto gives swing and shape to the big tuttis - the three 'whales' as Prokofiev called them - that support the structure of the First Concerto. When the soloist takes the spotlight, it's with polite firmness and with a strong sense of fun and fantasy. And so it goes on. In the Third Concerto Trpčeski's fine articulation allows him to free a number of passages from traditional but unmarked pedalling, which is certainly in the Prokofievian spirit as well as the letter of the score. Similarly, he shows that some traditional dynamic emphases aren't necessary to idiomatic characterisation. He does nevertheless allow himself those fractions of extra time that guarantee clarity and accuracy in the most demanding passages, and shifts of gear - whether abrupt or gradual - are negotiated with consummate skill, superbly

coordinated with the orchestra. Never is there any risk of derailment. Nor does the interpretation ever lapse into automatism.

There is a downside, however, in an occasional loss of impetus and tension. As a whole these recordings do come across as a little safe. And that's even before moving over to Vladimir Krainev's superflamboyant display, where every passage is driven to the max: be it by supersonic speed, biting articulation, hushed awe or industrial-strength power. True, the Russian recording is highly artificial, placing the listener as it were under the piano lid, then walking him/her round the platform to within touching distance of whichever orchestral section or soloist has the line. But there is so much sheer panache on display that it is hard not to listen with bated breath and dropped jaw.

So if you want a reminder that Prokofiev was a colossal show-off, Krainev is your man. But if you prefer a friendlier, more civilised experience, then Trpčeski and Petrenko have a great deal to offer. The *Overture on Hebrew Themes* is a nice bonus, idiomatically pointed and shaped throughout. David Fanning

Concertos – selected comparison: Krainev, Moscow PO, Kitaenko (9/79<sup>k</sup>) (MELO) MELCD100 2227

#### **Prokofiev**

Symphonies - No 1, 'Classical', Op 25; No 7, Op 131. Lieutenant Kijé - Suite, Op 60 Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin / Tugan Sokhiev

Sony Classical (F) 88985 41943-2 (70' • DDD)



Tugan Sokhiev has impressed me in the past – his Tchaikovsky Fourth with the

Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse (Naïve, 1/07) in particular – but some of his choices here are puzzling, and one baffling.

He is certainly mindful of the parody rife in *Lieutenant Kijé* and the militaristic colours heralding the 'virtual' hero's birth are painted in bold strokes with cartoonish thwacks on the bass drum like a 21-gun salute. The Romance is cut of coarse cloth, a little on the sleazy side, and 'Kijé's Wedding', with its comically pompous trumpet and tuba alliance, hints at a dowdy (cue saxophone) provincial affair. But for all the character I miss a compensating brilliance where, for instance, the Troika ride could certainly have put on a bit more of a spurt tempo-wise.

This tendency to deliberate pacing brings an effortfully slow *Allegro* to the first movement of the *Classical* Symphony. Haydn's wit and whiplash reflexes could not be further from the spirit of Sokhiev's reading. Everything is writ too large, the *Larghetto* lovely but somehow out of scale with Prokofiev's vision, the Gavotta laboured. Only the finale really takes off – some spry playing from the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester – though even here he could have pushed the *molto vivace* more.

The Seventh (and final) Symphony fares best but is ultimately ruled out of court for me on the basis of one fatal decision best known to only Sokhiev. 'Wistful' is the word which perhaps best describes this ineffably haunting piece, suffused as it is by the fairy tales Prokofiev traversed in his ballets. The first movement's second subject is something quite magical in that regard. And it certainly invokes childhood, though with a seam of darkness and melancholy underlying. The boisterous Allegretto embodying a sweeping waltz suggestive of Cinderellas everywhere is dispatched with vigour and Sokhiev works up a decent head of steam as we hurtle towards midnight. Again, though, pushing the pace a little more would have added that last degree of excitement.

Another beautiful melody, beautifully played, melts the heart in the *Andante* 

espressivo and it is surely here that the regret welling up in the music signals where this piece is ultimately going. But here's the rub. When the rollicking high spirits of the finale give way to a glorious apotheosis of the first movement's second subject, the music as Prokofiev originally wrote it fades to a question mark almost as cryptic as that at the close of Shostakovich's last symphony. But Sokhiev opts for the revised ending a jolly pay-off that Prokofiev added against his better judgement as a kind of soft option, or appeasement, perhaps, to the powers that be. We know that he eventually thought better of it because he told Rostropovich never to use it. I wonder why Sokhiev did. Edward Seckerson

#### **Shostakovich**

Symphony No 1, Op 10. Scherzos - Op 1; Op 7. Theme and Variations, Op 3. Five Fragments, Op 42

Luxembourg Philharmonic Orchestra / Gustavo Gimeno



It's more than 10 years since Pentatone issued a recording of Shostakovich's First

Symphony, a distinguished effort from Vladimir Jurowski and the Russian National Orchestra whose lean sonority, only partly a product of divided violins, was presented with outstanding fidelity. The sound of the Luxembourg Philharmonic, captured in its own concert hall unveiled in 2005, proves warmer and rounder, not always to the music's advantage but likely to delight fans of natural, unshowy engineering. The coupling is distinctive too. For collectors loyal to physical format it will be a boon to have so generous a supplement of shorter compositions not readily accessible elsewhere (unless you can find Gennady Rozhdestvensky's recordings of the early pieces with the USSR Ministry of Culture Symphony Orchestra). Jurowski offered the more conventional pairing of the Sixth Symphony. The extras here are arranged chronologically. The prematurely Martinů-ish Op 7 Scherzo (1924) reveals Shostakovich's 'naughty' style more or less fully formed, while the later Fragments (1935), of which Vladimir Ashkenazy was an early champion (Decca, 6/88), anticipate the exploratory vein of the contemporaneous Fourth Symphony.

The conductor this time is Gustavo Gimeno, now music director in Luxembourg and just one of a wave of Spanish and Latin American youngsters being signed up by the record companies. His music-making, more dignified than galvanic, rather confounds expectations. Although the smaller items are nicely turned in their different ways, the First Symphony feels super-lucid and slightly bland. Less driven than its timbrally coarse Soviet-era predecessors, the interpretation of the main work also underplays the darker implications unearthed by more recent and perhaps more probing interpreters: Mark Wigglesworth springs to mind. That said, if you grew up with the likes of Efrem Kurtz and the Philharmonia (HMV, 1/59) you might well prefer Gimeno's relaxed neutrality. The orchestra lacks personality but at least its timpani are well-tuned. The attractively presented multilingual booklet notes are a welcome development from an audiophile label that has not always prioritsed such matters.

#### David Gutman

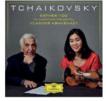
Symphony No 1 – selected comparisons: RNO, Jurowski (7/06) (PENT) PTC5186 068 Netherlands Rad PO, M Wigglesworth (9/12, 7/14) (BIS) BIS-SACD1603 or BIS1643

#### **Tchaikovsky**

Violin Concerto, Op 35. Swan Lake, Op 20 - Pas de deux; Danse russe. Sérénade mélancolique, Op 26. Valse-Scherzo, Op 34. Mélodie, Op 42 No 3 (arr Glazunov)

Esther Yoo vn

Philharmonia Orchestra / Vladimir Ashkenazy DG 🕃 481 5032 (67' • DDD)



I happened to miss Esther Yoo's DG debut disc of Sibelius and Glazunov concertos.

On the basis of this all-Tchaikovsky release, more fool me. I've reviewed the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto many times recently and this is the finest version to cross my path in the past year. Yoo, the youngest-ever winner of the Queen Elisabeth Competition in 2012, is clearly already an accomplished artist. Her dark, aristocratic tone is treasurable, yet one senses she isn't forcing unnecessarily for vulgar effect. She plays with compact vibrato and can pare her sound down to a fine *pianissimo* without her 1704 'Prince Obolensky' Stradivarius ever sounding undernourished.

Once again, Yoo is partnered by the Philharmonia and conducted by Vladimir Ashkenazy, a reassuring presence in Russian repertoire who doesn't pull around tempos and dynamics as Daniel Barenboim does on Lisa Batiashvili's otherwise excellent recording (also on DG). The

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first movement unfolds naturally and the cadenza is dispatched with panache, although Yoo's playing doesn't contain the exuberance of Ilya Kaler on a similarly programmed Naxos disc. Yoo maintains a sense of flow in the central Canzonetta, while the *Allegro vivacissimo* finale dances. In a booklet note, the violinist writes about her response to Tchaikovsky's music and how it's helped her in trying to overcome life's challenges. Her interpretation of the concerto is still a little skin-deep but should plumb the emotional depths in time.

The rest of the disc is made up of concertante works. There are a couple of numbers from Swan Lake, including the Andante from No 5, frequently transposed to the 'Black Swan' pas de deux. By throwing in these ballet bonbons, however, there's no room for the complete Souvenir d'un lieu cher, including the 'Méditation' which was the original slow movement to the concerto. This rather gives the edge to Kaler, if you're looking for a disc of Tchaikovsky violin works; but Yoo's expansive playing, though slower-breathed, is not without drama and makes this a most attractive disc. Mark Pulinger Selected comparison:

Kaler, Russian PO, Yablonsky (4/07) (NAXO) 8 557690 Concerto – selected comparison: Batiasbvili, Staatskapelle Berlin, Barenboim

(1/17) (DG) 479 6038GH

Villa-Lobos

Symphonies - No 8; No 9; No 11 São Paulo Symphony Orchestra / Isaac Karabtchevsky

Naxos M 8 573777 (74' • DDD)



These symphonies, composed between 1950 and 1955, are fascinatingly

paradoxical. All three are lavishly orchestrated and teem with activity, yet most of the musical material is terse, built from short motifs rather than the kind of expansive, folk-inflected melodies that one hears in the *Chôros* of the 1920s and *Bachianas brasileiras* of the 1930s and early 1940s – works that remain Villa-Lobos's most popular. Here or there, a broad melody will unfold. The slow movement of the Eighth Symphony, for example, is dominated by a gorgeous, yearning theme first played by the cellos.

Curious, too, is how this terseness leads one to expect a certain architectural clarity, yet the actual structures Villa-Lobos creates rarely follow traditional forms. At times, in fact, it's difficult to discern any form at all. Transitions can be brusque or non-existent, and several movements end abruptly.

Despite these various peculiarities and incongruities, however, the music offers myriad rewards. There's a sense of drama that I find distinctly (and appealingly) cinematic in its evocation of mood and atmosphere. Take the opening movement of the Eleventh Symphony, for instance: after excited fanfares that act as a Hollywoodworthy curtain-raiser, the music veers from the passionate to the suspenseful, and ends on an intriguingly ambiguous note.

The Eleventh was written for the Boston Symphony's 75th anniversary, and the Eighth and Ninth were composed for the Philadelphia Orchestra. For a sample of the kind of virtuosity these scores require, listen to the final minutes of the Eighth (starting at 4'58"). The São Paolo Symphony face the many challenges admirably - that mad dash at the end of the Eighth is managed with remarkable finesse - and, unlike the rival account on CPO under Carl St Clair, Isaac Karabtchevsky's sure-footed pacing conveys a deeper understanding of these scores. He also has the orchestra playing in better tune than St Clair's, which makes an enormous difference in music as finely shaded as this. An absolutely essential release. Andrew Farach-Colton

Symphony No 8 – selected comparison: Stuttgart RSO, St Clair (CPO) CPO999 517-2



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## Mahler's Fifth Symphony

Michael McManus meets **Osmo Vänskä** to decipher Mahler's meticulous markings in the score for his Fifth Symphony

he symphonies of Gustav Mahler rarely, if ever, make for easy listening, but one exception, for long stretches at least, is his Symphony No 5 in C sharp minor, composed between 1901 and 1902 during a period of intense personal fulfilment and happiness. By his own admission, Mahler did struggle with happiness – 'Ich bin ein schlechter Ja-sager' ('I am bad at saying yes') and hints of sunlight or positivity in his works are generally leavened by melancholy, sarcasm or sudden lapses into remote, dark, minor-key tonalities. This is certainly true of the Fifth Symphony.

The work was originally conceived in four movements, but during the early stages of composition, Mahler met and fell in love with Alma Schindler, who became his wife within just four months, already pregnant with their first daughter. Mahler then added an extra movement to the otherwise turbulent work – the famous *Adagietto*, conceived as a love poem to Alma. 'Love is a tool for creation,' he wrote to a friend. As the piece developed, Mahler would describe it as the product of an 'entirely different direction' in both his life and his art.

When I meet Osmo Vänskä to discuss the work, which he has just recorded for BIS with the Minnesota Orchestra, he seems remarkably fresh and relaxed for someone in the middle of a Europe-wide tour (with the Curtis Symphony Orchestra). He's reluctant to 'get technical' though, despite the LPO having provided him with a score exhibiting many of Mahler's own markings. 'He's telling the story of his life at this particular time,' says Vänskä, 'but it leaves a lot of things for us to understand...It's great to know everything that's been said about [the symphony], especially by him, but at the same time, the music is written so that it tells a similar story even if you don't know all of that.'

The principal theme of much of our contemplation is not 'the black dots' but Mahler's markings. For Vänskä, this piece offers a priceless opportunity to commune not only with one of our greatest composers, but also with a conducting colleague of rare gifts: 'When he wrote, he saw no reason to put away his conductor's hat. I like the dialogue between composer and conductor in the score. He has given special instructions to the conductor – he reminds [us] to take care, when to beat 16s and not triples.'





Recording Mahler: Vänskä in the control room (top) and with his Minnesota players

The opening rhythm echoes that of Beethoven's towering Fifth Symphony. 'He wants the ripple at the opening as a quasi-accelerando,' says Vänskä. 'Not exactly mathematical – make it interesting, make it exciting, make it sound natural.' Comparisons with Beethoven soon end, for this music is distinctively *sui generis*: 'It's good to remember the military-band influence from his childhood. How many times did he



#### The historical view

#### Mabler Letter to his wife Alma on October 14, 1904, four days before the Cologne premiere

What sort of face should the public make at this chaos, where an eternal new world is born in one moment only to be destroyed in the next...Oh, I wish I could premiere my symphony 50 years after my death!

#### Bruno Walter Writing in his book, Gustav Mahler (Dover: 2014, originally published 1936)

He has had enough now of struggling with weapons of music for a philosophy of life...Thus the Fifth Symphony is born, its face turned squarely towards life, and its basic mood one of optimism.

#### Sir Simon Rattle Gramophone (March 2010)

This is a piece desperately longing for a conclusion and one attempt after another fails...The finale has its shadows but it's really the last symphonic movement Mahler wrote where there is complete joy – unalloyed exaltation.

hear this kind of fanfare?' The exhortations in the score are quick in coming and the conductor must note their emotional, as well as musical, import: 'When you come to the *allegro* the first time, it says *Plötzlich schneller...Leidenschaftlich. Wild.* It's not a fanfare. It's like the clown in the circus tent whose face is painted to be happy, but who is actually very sad.' Vänskä feels the Jewish aspect is important too, comparing the heart of this movement to a sound picture of a column of desperate refugees reluctantly leaving their homes.

Mahler said the first two movements belong together like the two sides of a coin and Vänskä agrees. In the second movement, the conductor singles out a moment where the cellos take charge, in a sudden, intense and slow, F minor episode running into rehearsal mark 12 (bars 189-214). He paid particular attention to this section in his recording: 'Our cellists make this so, so soft, which makes it really touching. You are expressing your hopes and dreams. This movement too is littered with instructions, including a Mahler leitmotif – nicht schleppen ('don't drag'). Vänskä likens this to the gentle admonition of a father to an errant son: 'I know what you are doing - do this, don't do that.' Terms such as wuchtig ('heavy' or 'massive') are, points out Vänskä, 'nothing to do with tempo' – and everything to do with colour. We both laugh as we note the cascade of instructions towards the end of the movement, typified by nicht eilen ('don't rush') at bar 401 coming so hot on the heels of nicht schleppen at bar 392. It suggests a degree of micromanagement – almost hectoring – that would have been incomprehensible to an earlier generation.

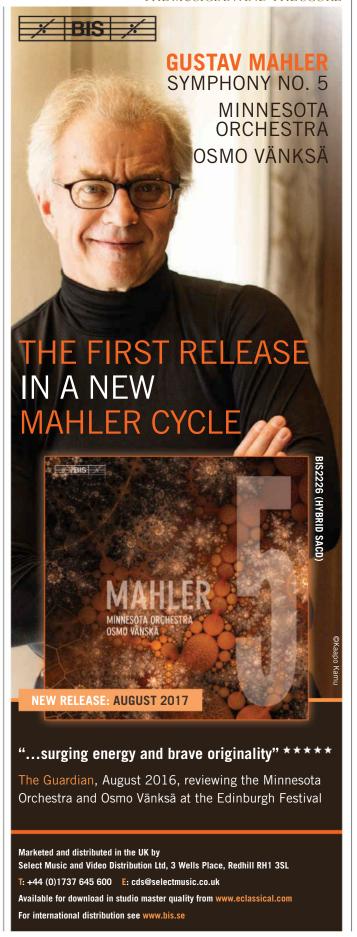
#### 'The Adagietto is one of the best love songs ever. Keep it slow, but still move. The sound colour is like a translucent curtain'

Mahler struggled with the orchestration of this symphony for the remainder of his life, and the stand-alone middle movement, the Scherzo, troubled him most of all. 'It will have a long history of suffering,' he warned. 'Conductors will take it too fast and make a nonsense of it.' Vänskä emphasises the concertante nature of the movement, which has been more prominently observed in recent years, and finds its musical roots in Austrian folk music, including yodelling. 'Technically, keeping all those long accelerandos and the slowing down – it's a huge challenge for the conductor and orchestra to keep all that with a living pulse.'

Vänskä describes the *Adagietto* as 'one of the best love songs ever. Keep it slow, but still move. I think it's very much a question of sound colour – the softest dynamics and a lot of air, like a translucent curtain. Mahler is saying, "If you are really happy, you must try to hide it".'

The finale, which follows the *Adagietto* without a break, is a 'Rondo including fugatos, fugues and canons', a constant swirl of key and mood changes. The horn calls in the D major opening are 'like a new start, refreshing the whole thing', akin to 'someone outside calling "Hey, hey, we are here!".' Mahler's recent fascination with Bach is much in evidence as the movement progresses: 'Here is a master composer, using all these formats and still keeping the music alive,' says Vänskä. 'It is written with great self-confidence, like a magician showing off his tricks.' **6** 

Read our review of Osmo Vänskä's recording of Mahler's Fifth on page 39



# Chamber



### Richard Bratby listens to some full-blooded Fauré and Franck:

'Nelson Goerner responds with huge cascading handfuls of notes that can dissolve in an instant into limpid droplets of sound' > REVIEW ON PAGE 50



### David Threasher enjoys Mozart from the LSO Wind Ensemble:

'It's a goodly noise, rumbustious in the dance movements and almost vandalous in the yobbish rondo-finale' ► REVIEW ON PAGE 52

#### **JS Bach**

'Bach Stories'

Three Sonatas, BWV1027-1029. Cantatas: No 147 - Jesus bleibet meine Freunde; No 170 - Vergnügte Ruh, beliebte Seelenlust; No 208 - Schafe können sicher weiden. Erbarm' dich, o Herre Gott, BWV721. Herr Gott, nun schleuss den Himmel auf, BWV617. Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend, BWV665. Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ, BWV639. Nun freut euch, lieben Christen g'mein, BWV639. Nun komm der Heiden Heiland, BWV659. O Lamm Gottes unschuldig, BWV656a. O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde gross, BWV622. Von Gott will ich nicht lassen, BWV658. Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme, BWV645 Marcin Zdunik vc Aleksander Dębicz pf



'A new way of thinking about classical music and improvisation'

and 'historical music practice in a contemporary form' is the intriguing concept behind 'Bach Stories', which feels very much like an offering with which Warner is hoping for some popular appeal, albeit not at the expense of sending more serious classical listeners running for the hills.

So what exactly does all the above mean? Well, modern instruments and pitch for a start, and indeed *genuinely* modern instruments too, because Aleksander Zdunik's cello is made by the respected Polish luthier Wojciech Topa. The first disc is devoted to Bach's sonatas for viola da gamba; played with no improvisational surprises and a strong but not slavish period awareness, these serve as a happy reminder that historically informed Bach performance doesn't have to mean gut and pluck to carry worth.

With the second disc the aforementioned concept comes fully into play, because here Debicz and Zdunik's sensitive Bach chorale transcriptions have been punctuated with their own improvisatory responses to them, and the emotional and stylistic directions these have taken often carry us off to

surprisingly profound new musical waters – sometimes loosely rooted in form and tonality, at other times freer on all levels as thoughts unfurl. Note the 'often' rather than 'always', though, because while Debicz took the 2013 Transatlantyk Instant Composition Contest for improvising composer-musicians, these improvs do occasionally skirt dangerously close to the sort of superficial classical crossover music that aims to push people's emotional buttons with minimum compositional effort.

Interestingly, the streamed version of this album is ordered slightly differently, with a cantata transcription slipped in after each of the disc 1 sonatas, and I found myself appreciating both listening experiences in equal measure. Indeed, on the whole, this is an album to appreciate if you can relax about the second disc's occasional whiff of classical chill-out.

Charlotte Gardner

#### Beach · Klouda · C Schumann

'Triptych'

Beach Piano Trio, Op 150

Klouda Piano Trio No 1, 'Fantasy Triptych'

C Schumann Piano Trio, Op 17

Monte Piano Trio

Genuin (F) GEN17449 (55' • DDD)



Surely the best music here is by Clara Schumann, the *Andante* slow

movement of her G minor Trio suggesting Brahmsian nostalgia touched by Robert's brand of poetry. Note how, after the solo piano's entry, the violin soars to the cello's pizzicato accompaniment, while the finale is somewhat closer to Smetana or Dvořák. The Monte Piano Trio offer a sympathetic account of this lovely work, though pressed to select a first choice I'd opt for the Tudor version with Joseph Silverstein (violin), Veronica Jochum (piano) and Colin Carr (cello), principally for the sake of its added lyricism.

Amy Beach's Trio has been well served by the Ambache chamber ensemble (Chandos), who bring more breadth to the *Lento espressivo* slow movement than do the Montes, though both ensembles capture the music's late-Romantic glow.

The centrepiece of this 'Tryptich' collection (three women, three centuries, three biographical periods and three players) was written especially for this particular ensemble. English-born Natalie Klouda composed a piece for the 2012 Olympics and her Fantasy Triptych of two years later takes the piano - which was the chosen instrument of Robert and Clara Schumann as well as Brahms - and places it in a central role for a score that toys with various effects and sonorities, each movement dedicated to one of the celebrated triumvirate. Clara's 'Explorations', Johannes's 'Reflections' and Robert's rather Bartókian sounding 'Vexations'. Though it plays for less than 13 minutes, Klouda's piece makes its points with clarity and focused imagination, while the programme overall is well planned and effective, and a viable prompt for future similar ventures. Given a choice, though, I wouldn't always want gender to dictate the composers represented – I would have hoped that by now we're way beyond that kind of special pleading. Rob Cowan

Schumann – selected comparison: Silverstein, Carr, Jochum (TUDO) TUDOR788 Beach – selected comparison: Ambache (12/99) (CHAN) CHAN9752

#### **Britten · Purcell**

'Chaconnes and Fantasias'

**Britten** String Quartets - No 2, Op 36; No 3, Op 94 **Purcell** Chacony, Z730. Fantazias - No 6, Z737; No 8, Z739; No 10, Z741; No 11, Z742

**Emerson Quartet** 

Decca (F) 481 5204 (74' • DDD)



My first port of call for comparisons in the Britten was the Belcea Quartet, initially in

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Fluid perfection: Bojan Čičić plays sonatas by the little-known 18th-century composer Giovanni Stefano Carbonelli

the first movement of the Second Quartet, where their account of the opening is starkly lugubrious, with melody and harmony achingly entwined. Turn then to the Emersons' more straightforward approach and it's more a case of mind over emotion, which is fairly characteristic of their intelligent approach to both works. In the agitated, muted Scherzo, the Emersons mark a dramatic dynamic contrast between the spiky staccato arpeggio accompaniment and the fierce unison top line. With the Belceas, the unison idea rules; and while the spiccato comes across well, it's less prominent. The Chacony finale opens to a unison theme followed by three sets of exploratory variations. Here the Belcea's added breathing space - over two minutes' worth - compounds the music's eerie effect. After the jagged opening motif, both quartets admit a good deal of tonal warmth.

The groundsprings of the remarkable Third Quartet lay with the Amadeus Quartet, Britten's creative advisors, who played it to him at his Aldeburgh home just weeks before he died, and then performed the work in public at Snape Maltings two weeks after his death. The voice here is very different, the third-movement Burlesque (marked to be taken fast and with fire) always strikes me, at least

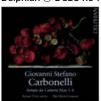
in its opening bars, as an angry-sounding reference to the finale of Brahms's Second Quartet, surprising given the widely acknowledged fact that Britten was no fan of Brahms's music, or maybe not so surprising given the music's combative mood. Here the Belceas and the Emersons are even-stevens, more or less. Again the Belceas are slower in the finale, marginally so this time, though there's some glorious solo playing on offer from the Emersons, especially from cellist Paul Watkins.

On the new disc both quartets are preceded by Purcell Fantazias, while the first track features the older composer's Chacony in G minor, the prime mover for the like-named finale of Britten's Second Quartet. As with the two quartets, Purcell's masterly essays are played with intensity and a winning sweetness of tone; and, viewed as a whole, the programme works exceedingly well, though I wouldn't want to be without either the Belcea Quartet or the pioneering Amadeus Quartet (Decca), whose affectingly sensitive account of the third movement of the Third Quartet, frail though it occasionally may be, focuses some desolate music that once or twice hints at acceptance. Rob Cowan

Britten – selected comparison: Belcea Qt (7/05) (EMI/WARN) 557968-2

#### Carbonelli

Six Sonate da camera **Bojan Čičić** *vn* **The Illyria Consort** Delphian (F) DCD34194 (64' • DDD)



Of the crop of Italian violinist-composers who successfully made London their home in

the early 18th century, Giovanni Stefano Carbonelli remains well below the radar in the 21st century. This isn't altogether surprising when the sum total of his surviving compositions is a solitary set of 12 violin sonatas. His career path probably didn't help: in the 1730s he switched from violinist to wine merchant. Still, if the number of surviving print copies of his violin sonatas is anything to go by then he clearly didn't choose the vintner's life because the violin-playing wasn't working out. This theory is further backed up by the 1774 posthumous inventory of his violin collection, which listed not one but two Stainer violins (and Stradivarius had not yet superseded Stainer as the most sought-after maker) plus a Strad. Hats off then to Čičić and his Illyria Consort for choosing the first six of Carbonelli's sonatas for their debut

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Bach in Weimar

For his biographer Philipp Spitta, Bach's period as organist and later Konzertmeister to the Duke of Weimar (1708-17) was the time of his 'early mastery'. Nowhere is this more evident than in the small but highly distinguished body of cantatas he wrote there, whether for the court chapel – the Himmelsburg or 'Castle of Heaven' – or for some clearly very joyful wedding (BWV 202). From the ravishing duets for soprano and oboe of the latter to the penitential strains of BWV 199, the radiant voice of Carolyn Sampson and the virtuosos of the Freiburger Barockorchester do full justice to the composer's infinite variety.



IMM 902252

recording, because not only is half their programme's music previously unrecorded, but it's all genuinely wonderful stuff.

Perhaps the most structurally striking elements of the sonatas are the fugal movements at the centre point of each; and given that the writing is not overtly flashy, Čičić's easy, fluid perfection through their webs of double-stopped complexities merits mentioning. Likewise the way he smoothly brings off Carbonelli's occasional ferociously unidiomatic modulations: listen to the Third Sonatas's Adagio and know that the passage from 0'26" to 0'42" is in fact a C sharp minor double-sharp-filled killer, despite calm appearances. Add tonal colour spanning the gamut from satisfyingly wiry to full and sweet, and it's a full house of deliciousness, all of which is bolstered further by the varied palette of continuo colour on display from Čičić's Illyria Consort colleagues, Susanne Heinrich's seven-string bass viol joined by either theorbo, archlute or baroque guitar from David Miller, and a combination of harpsichord and organ from Steven Devine. Really, bravo to the whole.

**Charlotte Gardner** 

#### Czernowin

Five Action Sketches - No 1, Breathe; No 2, So Narrow; No 4, Sliver; No 5, Sand. Wintersongs -No 2, Stones; No 4, Wounds/Mistletoe; No 5, Forgotten Light

Kai Wessel counterten Jeffrey Gavett bar International Contemporary Ensemble / Steven Schick

Kairos © 0015008KAI (58' • DDD) Recorded live at Miller Theatre, Columbia University, New York, October 23, 2014



In Chaya Czernowin's music the natural world is frequently present

and ever enigmatic. Nature here is not domesticated and anthropomorphised; it's wild and strange. Contours, tones, shiftings of sound are pieced together with a logic that's rigorous yet at the same time delirious.

Wintersongs (2003-14) is a cycle of five chamber works. Three of them are present here, alongside four of the brief Five Action Sketches (2014), which serve as interludes. Despite its title, Wintersongs is wholly instrumental except for Wintersongs V, where a baritone and countertenor sing wordless vocables. Continuity in the cycle is provided by the core ensemble: Wintersongs I is scored for a predominantly low septet (featuring bass flute, bass clarinet and bass trombone) and

each of the subsequent works adds to this ensemble in different ways.

This is music almost entirely based on extended techniques and textural layering. Sound categories blur. Scored for two septets, an octet and two singers, Wintersongs V: Forgotten Light periodically features an enormous cluster spanning the registral space. This gives way at times to percussive tremolos with countertenor and baritone whispering unintelligibly. The piece ends with all the performers scraping combs' teeth in a strangely soothing way. Make no mistake, it's forbidding stuff, but it rewards repeated listens. The other two Wintersongs are similar in aspect but vary in forces: Wintersongs II: Stones features undulating timpani, bowed cymbals and various percussive attacks and resonances, while Wintersongs IV: Wounds/Mistletoe adds to the low initial septet a higher septet of ululating winds.

The disc comprises live recordings made on the occasion of the premiere of *Wintersongs IV* and *V* at Miller Theatre in New York City. The performances are brilliantly committed, though occasionally there is a slight lack of clarity in the instrumental profiles. **Liam Cagney** 

#### Dennehy · Gilbert · Holt

'Bracing Change'

**Dennehy** The weather of it<sup>a</sup> **Gilbert** Haven of Mysteries<sup>b</sup> **Holt** 3rd Quartet<sup>c</sup>

<sup>b</sup>Guy Johnston *vc* <sup>b</sup>Carducci Quartet;

<sup>a</sup>Doric Quartet; <sup>c</sup>Jack Quartet

NMC (F) NMCD216 (68' • DDD)

Recorded live at Wigmore Hall, London, cJanuary 19, bJune 14, 2015; aJuly 15, 2016



The title is deliberately ambiguous. 'Bracing Change' can mean

both 'a refreshing change' and the notion of nurturing and supporting change. Both are in evidence on this recording of two string quartets and a quintet by three composers noted for their willingness to strike out along individual paths and embrace change.

Simon Holt's 3rd Quartet belongs to 'bracing change' in its literal sense. Edgy and unpredictable, the quartet is as invigorating as a shower of ice-cold water. Set out in six short movements, each with an evocative title and imaginatively captured on this recording by the Jack Quartet, Holt's music shifts from the visceral volatility of the first movement ('matins') to unexpected jolts and disruptions in the fifth ('the foresaken cry'). Exhausted by the music's

muscular exertions, the last movement ('Night's mantle descends') catches its breath on a final pulsing chord.

Change of a more programmatic nature is portrayed in Donnacha Dennehy's excellent *The weather of it*. Composed in a continuous musical stream lasting almost 20 minutes and performed with energy and vitality by the Doric Quartet, acoustically aerodynamic figures and patterns glide along until blown off course by sudden changes in direction or temperature. Shifts occur through rapid changes in register and articulation, with Dennehy imaginatively exploiting the quartet's full range and drawing on harmonics, overtones and microtones.

By contrast, Anthony Gilbert's Haven of Mysteries for string quintet replaces Dennehy's wave-like shapes with concentrated bursts of expression. As Steph Power observes in her booklet note, the central viola forms the fulcrum around which a series of dialogues is exchanged between two sets of violins and cellos. The Carducci Quartet imbue the work with hues of deep auburn and russet, underpinned by Guy Johnston's resonant cello. The work's original source of inspiration may have been Gilbert's interest in medieval architecture but the work is organically conceived, with change this time built into the very foundations of the material itself.

PwvII ap Siôn

#### Dusapin

String Quartets - No 6, 'Hinterland'a; No 7, 'OpenTime'

Arditti Quartet;

<sup>a</sup>Radio France Philharmonic Orchestra

Aeon (F) AECD1753 (57' • DDD)

#### Dusapin

'Item'

If<sup>a</sup>. Imago<sup>b</sup>. Immer<sup>b</sup>. Incisa<sup>b</sup>. Invece<sup>b</sup>. Iota<sup>b</sup>. Ipso<sup>a</sup>. Item<sup>b</sup>. Laps<sup>c</sup>. Ohé<sup>c</sup>

acBenjamin Dieltjens cl bcArne Deforce vc Aeon © ② AECD1756 (102' • DDD)





He may have limited presence in UK concert halls but Pascal Dusapin (*b*1955) continues to be among the most recorded of contemporary composers. These new Aeon releases focus on chamber music, including a follow-up to the Arditti set of his first five string quartets (9/10).

Both the latest instalments were written in 2009, but here similarities end. The Sixth Quartet features orchestra in what is less a concerto concept than an extension of the quartet's sound world on to a larger expressive canvas, the first movement setting up harmonic and rhythmic premises which its four successors build on in a visceral yet ultimately inconclusive manner, the discourse running down to an uneasy stasis. By contrast, the Seventh Quartet consists of 21 brief movements - each a variation on the motivic fragment heard at the outset - that can be heard as falling into three larger groups whose impetus is channelled towards increasingly stable and cohesive effect, the music reaching a calm which is audibly devoid of exhaustion. Both pieces reaffirm Dusapin's quartet cycle as among the most significant now emerging.

The other release brings together Dusapin's music for cello and/or clarinet, a substantial body of work which extends across almost two decades of his output. Earlier pieces tend to reflect the influence of those composers (notably Xenakis) who shaped Dusapin's attitude to timbre and texture, though even here an emphasis on gestural continuity points towards the organic formal designs of his maturity. Such is evident in *Laps*, where the two instruments unfold a dialogue that takes on greater emotional import as surely as it gains in momentum; qualities no less to the fore in Ipso, where solo clarinet focuses on spiralling arcs of sound that build to a heady culmination. The highlights, though, come with two major works for cello on the second disc. Immer makes inventive play with non-standard tuning in music whose melodic contours evince subtle overtones of folk music. Imago is more overt in its recourse to admittedly 'false' popular songs - its three pieces become unexpected and intriguing variations on each other in music that is among this composer's most engaging and approachable.

Both discs enjoy spacious and lifelike sound, notably in the frequently intricate textures of the quartets, with detailed though occasionally abstruse booklet notes (some knowledge of post-war French philosophy and aesthetics would not go amiss). Anyone new to Dusapin's music might start with the collection of orchestral works from Myung-Whun Chung (DG, 6/14) or the atmospheric and wide-ranging opera *Perelà – Uoma di fumo* (Naïve, 6/05), but the present discs are no less representative of this composer and as such can be warmly recommended. **Richard Whitehouse** 

#### Dvořák

String Quartet No 12, 'American', Op 96 B179.
String Quintet No 3, 'American', Op 97 B180a Škampa Quartet with aKrzysztof Chorzelski va Champs Hill © CHRCD110 (61' • DDD)



If you need a tonic, some relief from the insanity of the wider world (I write this in

the wake of the terror attacks in London and Manchester and the catastrophic fire at Grenfell Tower), then this might be just the thing. The Czech Škampa Quartet are on home ground here, enterprisingly pairing one of the most famous of all quartets with another 'American' work, the Third String Quintet.

Throughout the American Quartet the Škampa have an ease of manner that is reminiscent of the iconic reading by the Pavel Haas Quartet. That manifests itself right at the start, the viola player Radim Sedmidubský lustrously effective in the opening melody. The slow movement is deliciously inward, the Škampa taking their time and finding an extraordinary intensity in its closing moments. I like, too, their way with the Scherzo, which doesn't have the supercharged energy of the Emerson (a quality that persists even through the twice-repeated Trio). In its place we have warmth and elasticity as phrases are shared among the four players. Perhaps some will find the Pavel Haas, a degree faster, closer to the Molto vivace marking but the Škampa certainly don't sound sluggish. The finale unfolds with great exuberance and a delight in Dvořák's ever-changing textures. They also avoid the slightly distracting agogic ticks of the Pavel Haas (track 4, 0'51"), while the chorale-like third theme (from 2'20") is rapt indeed.

For the far less well-known *American* Quintet the Škampa have borrowed the Belcea's viola player, Krzysztof Chorzelski – a classy move. He is absolutely on the same wavelength as the quartet and this is a reading that gives the music time to breathe, conjuring a sense of great vistas in the manner of Dvořák's contemporaneous Ninth Symphony.

In the *Allegro vivo* Scherzo they relish the Dvořákian technique of setting a movement in motion with just a simple repeated note (here on the second viola). When the melody finally arrives, the second violin is suitably *espressivo*. Throughout the work, they balance warmth and clarity to superb effect, qualities particularly well illustrated in the variation-form slow movement, be it the lyrical theme itself or the tremololaden fourth variation. All cares are cast away in an infectious account of the bouncy finale, the players palpably enjoying the endless variety with which Dvořák treats

the rondo theme. With a warmly realistic recording from Champs Hill's Music Room, this is a tremendous achievement.

#### **Harriet Smith**

'American' Quartet – selected comparisons: Emerson Qt (2/91) (DG) 429 723-2GH Pavel Haas Qt (12/10) (SUPR) SU4038-2

#### Fauré · Franck

Fauré Violin Sonatas - No 1, Op 13; No 2, Op 108 Franck Violin Sonata

Tedi Papavrami vn Nelson Goerner pf Alpha (F) ALPHA271 (75' • DDD)



What does a disc of Romantic French violin sonatas suggest to you? Subtle colours,

belle époque elegance, the 'play of graceful, fleeting lines' that Debussy said he heard in the music of Gabriel Fauré? Not here. Listen to the way that Nelson Goerner and the Albanian violinist Tedi Papavrami open Franck's Violin Sonata. Hear the firmness of Papavrami's tone and sense the way that Goerner's lines quietly pull the music forwards with increasing momentum and weight. It feels like a symphonic prelude; and sure enough, when the second movement finally breaks, it's positively volcanic: a headlong, keyboard-shaking, lower-string-buzzing onrush of passion. No wonder Proust felt that this music burned itself on to your soul.

These are huge performances, of enormous intensity and sweep, and in the heat of the moment it's hard not to be carried away. Papavrami's playing is what you might call old-school, in the best way – ardent and rich-toned in all registers, with generous vibrato and an effortlessly fluid way of draping itself over a phrase. Goerner responds with an almost improvisatory flexibility and imagination, delivering huge cascading handfuls of notes that can dissolve in an instant into limpid droplets of sound.

That makes for a particularly ardent Fauré First Sonata, concerto-like in brilliance and scope, in which even the most delicate moments – such as Goerner's poetic accompaniment to the *Andante* – retain a sense of forward motion. True, it can feel relentless, and it has to be said that not everything on this disc sounds lovely (though moments are very lovely indeed). The ambiguities and half-lights of Fauré's Second Sonata surely need more clarification than they receive in this hectic performance. Overall, you'll either be intoxicated or appalled. It's magnificent – but is it chamber music? RIchard Bratby



On home ground: the Škampa Quartet (joined by viola player Krzysztof Chorzelski) excel in Dvořák, recorded in the Music Room at Champs Hill, West Sussex

#### Gade

'Chamber Works, Vol 3'
String Octet, Op 17<sup>a</sup>. String Quartet Movement.
String Quartet (unfinished, 1840) **Ensemble MidtVest;** <sup>a</sup>**Danish Quartet**CPO © CPO555 077-2 (56' • DDD)



When we tot up the profit-and-loss account of Niels Gade's bicentenary

year in December, I fear it won't be CPO's admirable chamber music series that puts the Danish composer's reputation in the black. In Vol 2 almost every piece was incomplete or rewritten from earlier material. In Vol 3 we have two movements of an unfinished Quartet in F and a single movement in A minor from Gade's first attempt at quartet-writing in 1836.

Mercifully, the headline piece is Gade's Octet, for which the strings of Ensemble MidtVest are joined by the Danish Quartet. The shadow of Mendelssohn looms over much of Gade's output but here the point of comparison is more specific. Gade's attempt to generate the same sort of youthful momentum as heard in Mendelssohn's Octet only partly succeeds, first as his textures can get a little dense and second

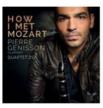
as his themes are almost always built for development rather than born of inspiration.

As noted before, sometimes when Gade takes one eye off Leipzig's classical-romantic rulebook his music breathes more freely. The unfinished Quartet in F major, loosely based on 'Willkommen und Abschied', is a good example, with Gade evocatively capturing the sense of nervous anticipation of Schiller's words.

Gade is rarely more charming than in that quartet's slow movement but I feel this music marked *Adagio* needs a slower pace to indulge its sense of wonder. Still, Ensemble MidtVest sound warm and secure, with tender solos from Matthew Jones's violin in the A minor movement, even if the Leipzig Quartet (MDG) are a little more virile. The Danish Quartet, playing mostly in 'second' chairs, blend well with their colleagues in the Octet but a closer sound that reveals the music's weave might have aided the cause of a composer who is often more interesting under the surface than he is on top. Andrew Mellor

#### Mozart · Weber

'How I Met Mozart'
Mozart Clarinet Quintet, K581
Weber Clarinet Quintet, Op 34
Pierre Génisson d Quartet 212
Aparté ® AP149 (61' • DDD)



'How I Met Mozart': how indeed? Don't look for answers in the booklet of this

CD, which includes several pictures of the young French clarinettist Pierre Génisson looking moody next to walls, and even a full-page advert for Buffet Crampon clarinets, but no biographical details about Génisson and almost nothing about Quartet 212 beyond the bare information that they're members of the New York Metropolitan Opera orchestra.

Does that matter? Only if you're interested in following these artists in future, and on the strength of these performances you might well be. Start with the Weber: not quite as common a pairing with the Mozart as you might expect, and sometimes dismissed as a piece of virtuoso froth. From the opening bars, where Génisson glides in from above and settles easily into a lilting melody, to the bubbling, exuberantly over-thetop finish, these players seem to me to strike exactly the right balance of wit and theatricality: surging dramatically towards the climax of the second-movement Fantasia and solving the rhythmic puzzles

of the Menuetto with tongues very much in cheek.

It helps that the quartet play with such a clear, slimline sound; their crispness, set against Génisson's sweet tone and (in the two finales, especially) almost balletic suppleness, gives the Weber, in particular, a delicious piquancy. Génisson doesn't make a single harsh or strident sound throughout. Regrettably, the Mozart feels noticeably more cautious: this is an elegant, unmannered account that doesn't milk the emotion - making the ensemble's more extrovert moments (such as their aggressive forte-pianos in the first Trio) feel slightly misplaced, rather than a foretaste of the character and imagination they bring to the Weber. Richard Bratby

#### Mozart · Haydn

**Haydn** Divertimentos, HobXIV - No 4; No 7; No 8; No 9 **Mozart** Three Keyboard Concertos after JC Bach, K107

#### **Ensemble Castor**

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi 🖲 88985 43264-2 (66' • DDD)



The three concertos designated K107 are in fact arrangements of sonatas (Op 5

Nos 2-4) by JC Bach, whom Mozart had met in London in 1764 and who was to exert an important influence on the child composer's style. It seems that they were arranged early the following decade (Bach's sonatas had been published in London in about 1765) to cater to the need for concertos for the Mozart children's concert tours. They're perfectly decent little things, entertaining in the galant style without feeling the need to say any more than can be gleaned from their glittering surfaces. Apparently Mozart wrote out the orchestral outlines, including any newly created tutti material, and his father squeezed the clavier part in on the empty staves. So they're almost three-way collaborations.

Erich Traxler's piano is a 1795 model by Joseph Dohnal and matches well the attack of the string trio (whose instruments are not identified in the CD booklet), even if the keyboard is a little subdued in the mix. And while there's naturally nothing of the depth of the mature piano concertos here, these players never fail to find something to say. An example is the minuet finale of the D major Concerto (No 1), whose Trio section features plucked strings against a keyboard part with the sustain pedal held down, creating a beguiling halo of sound

and a welcome contrast to the Alberti bass that prevails in so much of this music.

Haydn's divertimentos come from his earlier years too, some written for his first employer, Count Morzin, and some during the 1760s for the Esterházy family. The piano takes the lead here, with the violins and cello supporting the right and left hands. The most virtuoso music is here too, not least in the almost Bachian toccata that closes No 4 in C.

There's no great revelation among this music but then it wasn't written for that purpose. It was conceived purely to entertain and that's exactly what it does. Lovely, imaginative performances on some sweet-sounding period instruments.

#### David Threasher

#### Mozart



*Gramophone*'s classification (12/08) of the LSO as the fourth-best orchestra

in the world always made me think of The Housemartins, who advertised themselves as the fourth-best band in Hull.

Nevertheless – and can it really be almost a decade since that exercise was undertaken? – it still means that when its players are on top form, you'll barely get a better orchestral night out in London.

The same goes for its wind soloists, of course, 12 of whom come together with double-bassist Colin Paris for Mozart's irresistible Gran Partita. It's a goodly noise, rumbustious in the dance movements, sleek in the intensely wrought sonata form of the first movement, caressing in the slow music and almost vandalous in the yobbish rondofinale. There's the excitement of the live performance, too - and this really is live and in-your-face. There are all the noises of wind-playing, from intakes of breath to keywork, and not excluding the very sounds of transferring a column of air from one's lungs down the tube of an instrument. There are one or two moments when coordination goes awry but never for long; and three or four when a patch would have been required in studio conditions (there's one where the oboe's top B flat malfunctions at the outset of the great Adagio's recap).

Forty-eight minutes of fun, then, even if not the ultimate library choice. One other

thing occurred during listening. I learnt this music as a student from Collegium Aureum's proto-steampunk periodinstrument version (DHM, long deleted), in which maximum contrast was made between perky clarinets and wheezy bassethorns. On modern instruments, the single reeds sound so similar (excepting the difference in range) that it's hard to tell where one ends and the other takes over.

#### **Raftery**

String Quartet No 1<sup>a</sup>. First Companion<sup>b</sup>. Pleasantries<sup>b</sup>. 'Friedhof' Quintet<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Heath Quartet; <sup>b</sup>Berkeley Ensemble;

<sup>c</sup>Animare Ensemble

Métier (F) MSV28569 (66' • DDD)



This is – I believe – the first commercial recording of music by Kevin Raftery (*b*1952),

an expatriate American composer (born in St Louis) who has lived and worked in London since 1989. A pupil of Fricker (at Berkeley) and Justin Connolly (who had studied with Fricker in London) at the Royal Academy of Music, Raftery is a practical musician, member of the New London Chamber Choir, jobbing bassoonist and director of the Richmond Concert Society.

His sombre, single-span First Quartet (2012; a Second was completed this year) is a memorial for a quartet-loving friend. Its concentrated single span seems both an expression of their lively discussions and a coming to terms with the loss. First Companion (also from 2012) is a quartet for clarinet, bassoon, violin and viola designed to accompany Schubert's Octet and the Septets of Beethoven and Stravinsky in concert programmes. Its lighter, garrulous discourse also alludes to The Canterbury Tales; a group sharing stories along a journey. Pleasantries (2011), by contrast, is a set of nine 'whimsical' miniatures for oboe doubling cor anglais, clarinet, bass clarinet and bassoon, many dedicated to past American composers. The Friedhof Quintet (2011; for flute, harp and string trio) is again a memorial, to Raftery's mother, who died in 2010.

This is a most worthwhile disc of fine, well-made chamber music by a composer largely unknown to the wider world. Métier has a tradition in this, as with its Jane Wells disc from 2000 (and still available – just!). Nicely clear, warm sound as usual from this label.

**Guy Rickards** 

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#### C Schumann · R Schumann

C Schumann Drei Romanzen, Op 22 R Schumann Fantasiestücke, Op 73. Märchenerzählungen, Op 132<sup>a</sup>. Drei Romanzen, Op 94. In der Nacht, Op 74 No 4a. Klavierstücke, Op 85 - No 6, Trauer: No 12, Abendlied Patrick Messina c/aPierre Lenert va

Fabrizio Chiovetta pf Aparté (F) AP153 (55' • DDD)



It's quite rare that a clarinet disc focuses on Robert Schumann. A clarinettist's chamber

repertoire tends to be built upon his great friend, Johannes Brahms. Schumann himself wrote very little for the instrument. The three Op 73 Fantasiestücke – composed over just two days in 1849 in Dresden are undemanding works, often used as a gentle recital opener, while the Märchenerzählungen for clarinet, viola and piano (the same combination of instruments as Mozart's Kegelstatt Trio) was one of Schumann's final works, four fairy tales composed in raised spirits following a visit from Brahms and Joseph Ioachim. These are the only works on Patrick Messina's disc which were originally composed for clarinet; the rest – including three Romances by Robert's wife Clara - have been either transcribed or purloined from other instruments.

Messina has a wonderfully fluid tone, not as burnished as Karl-Heinz Steffens on another all-Schumann collection (Tudor), but lighter. Messina and his pianist, Fabrizio Chiovetta, keep the Op 73 pieces on the move while maintaining an element of fantasy (Schumann took his title from ETA Hoffmann). Joined by viola player Pierre Lenert, the Märchenerzählungen are winningly played - much livelier than Dirk Altmann and friends in stodgy form on Hänssler. The second, marked Lebhaft und sehr markiert, is strongly accented, making one regret that Schumann left no clue as to any of the fairy tales' contents.

The three Op 94 Romances were composed for oboe. Schumann resisted attempts by his publisher, Simrock, to transcribe them for clarinet, arguing 'If I had composed the original for clarinet and piano, the result would have been completely different'. That didn't stop Simrock printing alternative parts for violin and clarinet anyway, and Messina does a persuasive job, the result sounding more introverted and autumnal than when played on the oboe, with its pastoral connotations. Clara's Op 22 Romances, composed for violin and piano, are no less fine, Messina

displaying cheeky wit in the trills of the second. An amiable programme, devoid of masterpieces but engagingly performed.

#### Mark Pullinger

Schumann Opp 73 & 94 - selected comparison: Steffens, Wisniewska (TUDO) TUDOR7105 Opp 73, 94 & 132 - selected comparison: Altmann, Henschel (HANS) CD98 445

#### Twigg

Phantasy Variations on a Theme of Haydna. String Triob. Piano Trioc. String Quartet No 1, 'Hommage à Hukvaldy'<sup>d</sup>. Piano Quartet<sup>e</sup> <sup>c</sup>Hiroaki Takenouchi pf <sup>b</sup>Montpellier String Trio; adBridge Quartet (ceColin Twigg, Catherine Schofield vns eMichael Schofield va ceLucy Wilding VC) Toccata Classics (F) TOCC0387 (77' • DDD)



Listeners unfamiliar with this composer have more than likely heard his playing,

Colin Twigg (b1960) having been a violinist in the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra for 25 years and leader of the Bridge Quartet this past decade. The first disc devoted to his music features five chamber works written over a 13-year span, the earliest being a String Trio (1996) whose modest length and undemonstrative idiom (that of the classical chamber tradition from Haydn to Bartók) do not belie Twigg's mastery of this exacting medium or his questing approach to formal continuity across and between movements. Such qualities are accentuated in the First String Quartet (1997): the most substantial piece here, its subtitle denotes less the influence of Janáček than of Moravian folk music throughout its eventful and often invigorating course.

Less arresting in expression yet more insinuating in its motivic evolution, the Piano Quartet (2000) most fully conforms to the chamber ideal as an interplay of equals - its genesis as a piece for viola and strings is detectable in a subtle emphasis on that instrument. Here and in the Piano Trio (2004) there is a feeling of the piano deployed more as textural filler than for the interest of its ideas, for all that Hiroaki Takenouchi's pianism is a model of poise. Phantasy Variations on a Theme of Haydn (2009) is a resourceful take on this quintessentially English form, putting its indelible theme through a logical and satisfying process of developing variation. Performances, recording and Twigg's booklet notes are all exemplary, making for a worthwhile addition to Toccata Classics' enterprising catalogue. Richard Whitehouse

#### 'Schabernack'

'A Treasure Trove of Musical Jokes' Biber Battalia a 10. Harmonia artificiosa-ariosa -Partia IV Fux Les combattans, K323. Pour le coucou Schmelzer Arie con la mattacina. Sonata Cu Cu, Spoglia di Pagagi Walther Hortus chelicus - No 15, Scherzo d'augelli con il cuccu Les Passions de l'Ame / Meret Lüthi vn Deutsche Harmonia Mundi © 88985 41549-2 (57' • DDD)



Given how rare it is to find a centuries-old instrumental work to be really, genuinely

funny, it's tempting to take Schabernack's cover promise of 'a treasure trove of musical jokes' with a pinch of salt. However, Meret Lüthi is remarkably gifted at delivering what she's outlined on the tin, as her ensemble's 'exotic violin music' debut disc revealed so enjoyably (12/13). So, while the schabernacks or 'pranks' here won't quite have you guffawing, it's certainly all delivered with a merry wink I'm finding impossible to tire of, whether the music is referencing stock commedia dell'arte characters, imitating birdcalls or simply providing a backdrop to madcap festivities.

As a result, while sheer rarity value is undeniably one of this disc's draws given that much of its music exists only in manuscript form, the more-recorded repertoire is equally rewarding thanks to Lüthi's playful teasings-out of jokes missed by other fine baroque bands. Take her delicious upwardsscooping portamento tickles in the *Presto* of Biber's Battalia a 10, for instance. This particular battalia also serves to illustrate the degree of clever storytelling happening across the programme; note how robust martial thwack is eschewed in the 'Der Mars' movement in favour of something far more reined-in and elegant, meaning that when the stops are pulled out for 'Die Schlacht' we're being offered something new. Likewise, Fux's sweet little Pour le coucou (with nose flute in the title-role) opens not with all hands on deck but with the delicate pluckings of dulcimer and theorbo, so when the rest of the band do swing in they bring an instant lift.

Indeed, nose flutes, rattle belts, knives, bowls and other crazy percussion notwithstanding, 'Schabernack' is as much about beauty and delicacy as it is about humour and surprise, and those two sides join together perhaps most wonderfully in Schmelzer's Sonata Cu Cu, when Lüthi's exquisite cuckoo-call bariolage sounds over a gentle wash of percussion colour. All in all, great stuff. Charlotte Gardner

# Leopold Stokowski

Rob Cowan pays tribute to the pioneering British maestro who made a major impression in America, left a significant recorded legacy and continued working well into his nineties

hile the Italian Arturo Toscanini conjured lean-limbed Apollo, the German Wilhelm Furtwängler spontaneous Dionysus and the Dutch maestro Willem Mengelberg stood his ground somewhere between the two, the British conductor Leopold Stokowski (1882-1977; born in London of Polish and Irish descent; and not 'Leonard Stokes' as was once supposed) was the fearless adventurer, a Marco Polo whose exploits and discoveries held the musical world in thrall for some six decades and thanks to recordings still does. Generations cut their classical teeth on Disney's animation masterpiece *Fantasia* (released in 1940), in which Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* backed the looming Jurassic spectre of dinosaurs and Mussorgsky's *Night on the Bare Mountain* released a deadly community of demons. But perhaps the film's most striking image related to Stokowski's conducting of Posh's Toggets.

conducting of Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor (BWV565), a sumptuous orchestration that led the curious towards his epochmaking 'symphonic syntheses' (created in the 1920s and '30s) of Wagner (The Ring, Tristan und Isolde and Parsifal) and Mussorgsky (Boris Godunov). This meant that repertoire normally exclusively destined for either the organ loft or the operatic stage could rely on Stokowski to retexture and rebuild so that listeners at home could enjoy the same music as transferred to the handsome instrument known as the Philadelphia Orchestra. Years later, dedicated Stokowskians would scour record bargain basements and market stalls for discarded copies of these masterly arrangements.

My own Stokowski epiphany was via Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony – his 1934 recording with the Philadelphia Orchestra (Victor/HMV), with which he had already been working for more than 20 years.

It's a performance that combines tonal bloom with great emotional intensity, especially in the second movement (a comparatively broad reading at 13'43"), where the wonderful Arthur Berv plays solo horn. The climaxes are overwhelming, while the finale seems to me to be ideally paced, eschewing superfast tempos that I would later find rather disconcerting.

So Stoky was my man for Tchaikovsky's Fifth. But as I had just been kitted out to play vinyl, I needed an LP equivalent (in my tender youth I expected one version of a major work to sound much like another), so I opted for a relatively inexpensive HMV Concert Classics LP by the North West German Philharmonic conducted by Wilhelm Schüchter. I think I played it once, then returned to my Stokowski 78s. There's something about those soaring Philadelphia strings, their luscious portamentos, where phrases crescendo or

subside according to the dictates of mood. This was also the story with Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition, which in Ravel's orchestration is elegant but just a mite brittle, whereas in Stokowski's version (1939) - although he discarded 'Limoges' and 'Tuileries' (thinking that both were the work of Rimsky-Korsakov) - the grandeur of old Russia seems suddenly to come alive, with parts of 'The Great Gate of Kiev' sounding like the death scene from Boris Godunov, and 'Samuel Goldenberg' and Schmuÿle' a merciless, larger-thanlife depiction of dire poverty bullied by wealth.

And so it went on, this hungry pursuit of Stokowski's records, especially those made in America with the Philadelphia, NBC Symphony, All-American Youth and 'His' Symphony orchestras. Although Stokowski recorded Stravinsky's Petrushka with the Philadelphia Orchestra pre-war, the version that gets me every time is his rattling, madcap, utterly theatrical 1950 remake with His Symphony Orchestra, which was reissued by Testament coupled with a fine 1951 Rimsky-Korsakov Sheherazade with the Philharmonia Orchestra. Petrushka features many distinctive solos and captures the score's pathos like no other version that I've ever heard. Some will deem it a wilful distortion, but listen

#### **DEFINING MOMENTS**

- •1898 Young London organist and choirmaster At the age of 16 becomes a member of the Royal College of Organists. Two years later, forms the choir of St Mary's Church, Charing Cross Road
- 1909 Official conducting debut In Paris on May 12 accompanies his future (first) wife the pianist Olga Samaroff in Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto
- •1912 *Philadelphia Orchestra appointment* On October 11 makes his Philadelphia Orchestra debut, having recently been appointed its director
- •1929-30 Pioneering spirit

During the symphony season, abandons his baton and nurtures the 'Stokowski' or 'Philadelphia' sound, largely through the use of free bowing and toying with seating arrangements and concert-hall acoustics

•1939 – Works with Walt Disney

Collaborates with Walt Disney on the animated film *Fantasia*, programming some of his own arrangements (most notably Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV565) and appearing on screen with Mickey Mouse

- 1940 Forms his own youth orchestra Forms the All-American Youth Orchestra, its players ranging in age from 18 to 25
- 1960 *Philadelphia reunion*Appears with the Philadelphia Orchestra as guest conductor and records with them again
- •1973 *Still conducting live at the age of 91* Conducts the International Festival Orchestra at the Proms, performing Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony

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beneath the surface and you sense, in addition to the drama, the puppet's faltering heartbeat.

Happily, for those who are averse to mono sound, one of the best of the Wagner 'syntheses', Tristan und Isolde (there are numerous rewrites that are subtly unalike), was remade for CBS in stereo in 1960. I'll never forget an occasion when a friend of mine who professed a loathing of Wagner heard this particular production and came close to swooning. 'I've never heard anything quite so Romantic,' he exclaimed. Once I let on what he was actually listening to he spent the rest of the afternoon backtracking. This, I suggest, is the best place to start: Tristan, or part of it, as transformed into an organic tone poem the virtual equal of something by Liszt or Scriabin. Also, there are the 1957 Capitol recordings of Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* and Sibelius's The Swan of Tuonela, both of them quite magical in the way Stokowski moulds phrases and inspires the very best from individual soloists.

To be frank, what with the sheer bulk of what Stokowski left us (including numerous world premiere recordings), it is best to check online for what is available. For me,

the highlight among his later London recordings is a Royal Albert Hall BBC SO relay from the 1964 Proms of Falla's *El amor brujo* (BBC Legends), as fiery as any on disc and a notch up from studio versions of the score for RCA and CBS (1946 and 1960 respectively). London recordings of Beethoven and Mahler, both live and studio, have their rightful devotees, but for me, Stokowski's truly golden period was in America from the late 1920s to the early 1960s. This was when the great aural sculptor was making records and broadcasts the likes of which have to this day never been equalled. **G** 

#### SELECTED ESSENTIAL RECORDING



#### The Columbia Stereo Recordings

Sony Classical

This includes the *Tristan* synthesis, Beethoven's *Emperor* Concerto (Glenn Gould), the first recording of Ives's Symphony No 4 (which caused a major stir) and Bizet's Symphony in C, from Stokowski's last recording session, in 1977.

# Instrumental



#### Lindsay Kemp admires Pierre Hantaï's latest Scarlatti volume:

'The music is never a clatter, because when the notes are flying Hantai's quick technique always gives them time to sing' > REVIEW ON PAGE 60



#### David Fanning welcomes Nikolai Lugansky's articulate Tchaikovsky:

Not surprisingly, Lugansky shows himself a master of Tchaikovskian drama and lyricism in equal measure' > REVIEW ON PAGE 61

#### JS Bach

Six French Suites, BWV812-817 **Vladimir Ashkenazy** pf Decca (© 483 2150 (83' • DDD)



By the time you read this, Ashkenazy will have turned 80 – which seems

almost unbelievable. He has been turning increasingly to Bach over the past few years and these recordings of the *French Suites* were made a year apart: Nos 1-3 in April last year, No 4-6 as recently as this March. His love for Bach's music is not in doubt, for it shines through every dance in every suite. Speeds tend to be relatively swift, which means that the suites fit on to a single disc, unlike the superb recent set from Murray Perahia, 10 years Ashkenazy's junior.

This is very much a set of two halves, for the 2016 performances sound less technically confident than those of this year. I admire the way Ashkenazy doesn't let age stand in the way of tempos, but the result can be a tad uneven (the opening Allemande of the First Suite, the Courante of the Second) or effortful (the Gigues of Nos 1 and 3, or the Air of No 2). Given that Ashkenazy has never been one of the keyboard world's great colourists, there is, unfortunately, nothing to distract the ear from these frailties.

However, the second three suites fare far better. Ashkenazy launches into the Allemande of the E flat major Suite (No 4) with a quiet confidence, faster-paced than the daringly spacious Perahia, while the following Courante and Sarabande are by turns spirited and nicely flowing, contrasting with a pleasingly spiky Gavotte; for the concluding Gigue, too, Ashkenazy finds an infectious zest. In the Fifth Suite we get a real study in contrasts - the graceful opening movement, a Sarabande that unfolds very naturally and a Loure that has an appealing communing quality to it, set against the vigour of the Courante, Gavotte and Gigue. The Sixth is slightly

less convincing, the Courante sounding a little breathless, lacking the finesse of Perahia's phrasing, while there's a certain weariness of finger in the Gigue; to the Sarabande, though, Ashkenazy brings a touching sense of nobility. Harriet Smith Selected comparison:

Perahia (11/16) (DG) 479 6565GH2

▶ See our Ashkenazy feature on page 22

#### **Beethoven**

Piano Sonatas - No 24, Op 78; No 28, Op 101; No 32, Op 111. Capriccio, 'Rage over a Lost Penny', Op 129

Ingrid Marsoner pf Gramola © 99111 (65' • DDD)



Over the past decade and a half, the Austrian pianist Ingrid Marsoner has released

some seven recordings playing, in addition to the Viennese Classical masters, Bach, Hummel and Janáček. This new Beethoven recording, however, was my introduction to her work.

From the ample, upward yearning phrases that open Op 101, it is clear that Marsoner's approach to Beethoven is direct, no-nonsense and free of eccentricity. She is willing to work within the parameters of contemporary thinking about Beethoven, fashioning from familiar tools a rich interpretative tapestry that is uniquely her own. Apt voiceleading features prominently in the first movement's leisurely unfolding, presaging the sonata's prevalent contentment. The Scherzo's light tread proclaims it a march expunged of regimentation or bellicosity, progressing instead towards happy fulfilment. The searching Adagio is seamlessly folded into to that progress, culminating in a finale of crystalline polyphonic clarity, its folk-like digressions all the more delightful for their naturalness. A pert and understated Rage over a Lost Penny sets up a vivid contrast for the graciously welcoming lyricism of Op 78.

The rollicking high spirits of the delightful finale are contagious.

It may be in the craggy, windswept heights of Op 111 that Marsoner is most impressive. Mercurially shifting moods in the *Maestoso*, from terrifying insistence, panicked uncertainty, to roiling struggle follow one another with an inevitable emotional logic. The sublimely serene cosmic regions in which the Arietta blossoms never seem static because of the deftly woven textures that constantly engage the imagination. Here, Marsoner's ability to suggest the mighty integrity of Beethoven's architecture from multiple points of view within the musical narrative is particularly impressive.

This is mature Beethoven which will be understandable by virtually anyone, even as it remains engagingly personal in expression. Without awe, Marsoner expresses her reverence for Beethoven with scrupulous attention to detail. This well-recorded disc will be a welcome addition to any library of Beethoven piano music. Patrick Rucker

#### **Bingham**

Altartavla<sup>a</sup>. Angel Fragments<sup>a</sup>. Annunciation IV - Meine Seel' erhebt den Herren<sup>a</sup>. The Everlasting Crown<sup>b</sup>. Glass Beatitude<sup>a</sup>. Hadrian's Dream<sup>a</sup>. Jacquet's Ghost<sup>d</sup>. The Linnaeus Garden<sup>c</sup>. Missa brevis 'Videntes stellam'<sup>a</sup>. Tableaux vivants<sup>e</sup>. The Three Angels<sup>a</sup>

Stephen Farr abod org/e/hpd with Geremy Cole org Resonus (123) RES10191 (123) DDD)

Played on the Harrison & Harrison organs of bSt Albans Cathedral and aGSt Edmundsbury Cathedral and the Metzler organ of Trinity College, Cambridge



Although Resonus proudly proclaims, more than once, that this two-CD set of

organ music by Judith Bingham consists 'entirely of world premiere recordings', this is potentially rather misleading. This recording of *The Everlasting Crown*, which

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A masterly guide: Claire Huangci offers an impressive survey of Chopin's complete Nocturnes on Berlin Classics

Stephen Farr premiered at the 2011 Proms, was made on the organ of St Albans Abbey and was first released as a Resonus download in 2012. I reviewed it here in July 2012.

As for the genuinely new recordings, those on the first disc, recorded on the organ of St Edmundsbury Cathedral, include several written for Johann Hammarström, organist of Västerås Cathedral in Sweden. One of these, The Linnaeus Garden, is a duet in which Stephen Farr is joined by Jeremy Cole. The others, all solo works, include five pieces each inspired by the Renaissance altarpiece in Västerås Cathedral brought together as a sort of organ suite, Altartavla, and two organ solo extracts from the Missa brevis 'Videntes stellam'. This disc also includes The Three Angels, depicting Lucifer, Michael and Gabriel in short, highly picturesque musical character sketches, and Hadrian's Dream, described as having been composed for this recording but actually dating back to 1999 and a choral work called Otherworld.

In addition to *The Everlasting Crown*, the second disc includes the four-movement *Jacquet's Ghost*, inspired by a *prélude* by the 17th century harpsichordist Élisabeth Claude Jacquet de la Guerre, recorded on the organ of Trinity College, Cambridge,

and the 15-minute *Tableaux vivants* for harpsichord solo.

The various stimuli and origins of this mixed bag of Bingham's recent organwriting are fully described in a booklet which verges on information overload comprising three lengthy essays by the composer, the performer and Andrew Stewart. The music itself gives a pretty fair picture of a composer for whom the organ is a vehicle for colour, melodramatic effect. occasional touches of humour (as in the barking dog of Angel Fragments) and historical legacy. Not everything works, notably a somewhat hazy piece called Glass Beatitude and a half-hearted choral prelude on Meine Seel' erhebt den Herren, both of which also suffer by having been recorded (as are all the tracks made in St Edmundsbury) at a low volume which obscures a lot of the detail. But when Bingham gets it right, the effect is pretty amazing. The Everlasting Crown certainly counts as one of the more significant organ works of the post-Messiaen age.

Stephen Farr is proving himself to be one of the most persuasive and compelling advocates for new British organ music and, as with his recent two-disc set of Leighton's music (4/17), these performances are beautifully prepared and powerfully delivered. Marc Rochester

#### Chopin

'A Chopin Diary'
Complete Nocturnes. Étude, Op 25 No 7ª
Claire Huangci pf with a Tristan Cornut vc
Berlin Classics (M) ② 0300905BC (117' • DDD)



The Chinese-American pianist Claire Huangci has been warmly praised

by my colleague Jed Distler (7/15) and it's easy to understand why. To record the complete Chopin Nocturnes at just 26 is a bold act but her love for this music is palpable. The set is called 'A Chopin Diary' (everything needs a USP these days) and in the booklet she writes, sincerely and urgently, of the spell cast on her by Chopin, as well as sharing quotes from Chopin's French literary contemporaries that illuminate her perception of each piece.

For me, a real test of a great Chopin interpreter is whether a sequence devoted to a particular genre actually works as a listening experience. In this instance, that's not only the standard 21 Nocturnes but also the extended *Nocturne oublié* in C sharp minor plus a reimagining of the Op 25 No 7 Étude for cello (Tristan

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Cornut) and piano, which, though beautifully played, forms a slightly odd endpiece.

Huangci has made this recording on a Yamaha which has a slightly harsh top register - unfortunate given that this is where Chopin is frequently at his most ethereal. That said, the ears adapt and Huangci is a masterly guide. She's aware of the importance of Chopin's Classical side and there are many instances where she favours restraint over cheap emoting, which is much to the good. There's also a real range of interpretation, which makes the set consistently appealing. She conveys the strange aura of Op 27 No 1 with a refreshing sense of inevitability, unleashing playing of real power in its climaxes, while Op 32 No 2 is given with a charming simplicity - if you are going to shade every phrase in this piece, you need to be on the level of Pires for it to convince. If I find Huangci's basic tempo for Op 37 No 1 a little slow, its inner chordal section is alluringly coloured.

One of the most impressive readings here is of the C minor Nocturne, Op 48 No 1, in which an innate solemnity grows to extraordinary depths in Huangci's hands. Occasionally I find her a little too dreamy – Op 55 No 2 works more potently in the hands of Pires or Rubinstein, while Op 62 No 1 also meanders a little too much; Pires here is a touch faster here and much surer of line. The posthumous Nocturnes are another highlight – Huangci offering lustrous right-hand scales at the close of the C sharp minor, while the drooping melody of the C minor is moving indeed.

An impressive addition to the Chopin catalogue from a pianist from whom I'm sure we'll be hearing much more.

#### **Harriet Smith**

Selected comparisons:

Pires (10/96) (DG) 447 096-2GH2 or 477 9568GM2 Rubinstein (RCA) 09026 63049-2

#### Debussy · Haydn · Schubert

Debussy Estampes Haydn Piano Sonata, HobXVI:46 Schubert Piano Sonata No 18, D894 Guillaume Bellom pf

Claves (£) 50 1707 (72' • DDD)



This is Guillaume Bellom's first solo CD and his debut on Claves. His

programme contrasts Classical-era Haydn and Schubert with the very different world of his compatriot Debussy.

He has previously recorded a disc of Schubert's piano duet works so perhaps it's not surprising that he should sound utterly at home in the G major Sonata, D894, with which he launches the disc. His musicality is abundantly clear from the off and the sonata unfolds with a pleasing sense of inevitability. He gets the sense of calm that pervades much of the opening movement, though he could perhaps have been more dramatically assertive in the chordal minor-key outburst that launches the inner section of the Andante. The contrasts within the Menuetto are more dramatic in the hands of some others (Uchida and Lupu, to name but two) but I like Bellom's insouciant way with the finale, even if some find a degree more gentle wit here too.

In the Haydn sonata Bellom brings alive its shifts and swerves, allowing the humour of the first movement to speak for itself rather than spoiling the joke by overstatement; he also relishes the unexpected dramatic heights reached in the development section. The solemn *Adagio* – which could not be in greater contrast – is given with gravitas, Bellom lending the arching melodic line an improvisatory quality, while the twinkling finale has an irresistible sense of play that gives even Bavouzet a run for his money.

I fear the same cannot be said for Bellom's Debussy *Estampes*, which, compared to Bavouzet's, are somewhat lacking in sensuality and colour. The mystery of 'Pagodes' is underplayed, while 'La soirée dans Grenade' fails to conjure the heat and dust of the finest evocations.

#### **Harriet Smith**

Schubert – selected comparisons: Lupu (5/76<sup>R</sup>) (DECC) 475 7074DC4 Uchida (12/97<sup>R</sup>) (PHIL) 475 6282PB8 Haydn – selected comparison: Bavouzet (5/10) (CHAN) CHAN10586 Debussy – selected comparison: Bavouzet (1/08) (CHAN) CHAN10443

#### Mattheson

Twelve Suites

Gilbert Rowland hpd

Athene (M) (3) ATH23301 (173' • DDD)



The name of Johann Mattheson (1681-1764) appears frequently in books

and articles about Baroque music, though seldom in connection with his own. As the most prolific and wide-ranging writer on music of his time he is still cited today, while Handel biographies rarely fail to mention how their man was nearly skewered by his friend Mattheson in a duel following a brief but fiery disagreement. As a composer, however, he is rarely discussed. Nearly all of his vocal output - eight operas and 26 oratorios - was lost to bombs in the Second World War, but among his surviving published compositions are these 12 harpsichord suites issued in London and Hamburg in 1714, works whose influence on the slightly later and stylistically kindred suites of Handel (and perhaps Bach) seems probable; Handel is said to have shut himself away and played them through from beginning to end when he received his copy.

They turn out to be worth reviving. Skilfully made and loosely varied in form and texture, they encompass elegant broken-chord allemandes, a brash concerto-like Prelude (No 7), delicate and imaginative sarabandes such as that of No 8 and a full-textured Air with Doubles in No 6 reminiscent of the 'Harmonious Blacksmith'. And if they come across as a touch ordinary at first, I found them growing on me as Mattheson's personality became more apparent. There is a charm about the way his music sometimes makes quaint little stops and starts, and he even reveals a sense of good humour if the perhaps deliberately bad fugue that opens No 11 is anything to go by. I've not come across a boutade before but I like the one in Suite No 9.

Gilbert Rowland's playing is assured, robust and reliable, and if his tread is a sometimes a touch earthbound, maybe such moments reflect dips in Mattheson's own creative concentration; certainly he is more successfully fired up by movements such as the ouvertures and the driving gigues of Nos 7 and 8. The fact that he is not note-perfect wouldn't really matter were it not irritating to think that the small smudges he makes could easily have been repaired. The French-style harpsichord is deep-toned and clear if lacking in distinctive character.

A tangier set was recorded by Colin Booth for Soundboard in 2007, more careful in places but in general more rhetorically eventful, while Cristiano Holtz's sprightlier and slicker single disc of seven suites (not all complete) for Ramée from 2006 is a worthwhile option if three hours of Mattheson suites seems a daunting dose.

#### Lindsay Kemp

Selected comparisons:
Booth (SOUN) SBCD208
Holtz (RAME) RAM0605



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#### Mussorgsky

Complete Piano Works **Giacomo Scinardo** pf

Dynamic (M) (2) CDS7786 (108)

Dynamic  $\ensuremath{\mathbb{M}}$   $\ensuremath{\mathbb{Q}}$  CDS7786 (108' • DDD)



The popularity of Pictures at an Exhibition continues unabated. Over-exposure has

almost certainly dulled our ears to the splendours of this singular work; most online sources list between 150 and 180 recordings currently available of the piano version alone. Unfortunately the ubiquity of Pictures has effectively overshadowed everything else Mussorgsky wrote for the instrument. Given short shrift are some 18 character pieces, dating from 1852, when the composer was 13, to 1881, the year of his death. They range from album leaves, salon pieces and the diptych From Memories of Childhood to travel sketches from his 1879 concert tour and two scenes destined for the unfinished opera The Fair at Sorochintsi. They are sympathetically presented here, along with Pictures, by the Italian pianist Giacomo Scinardo, a native of Paternò, who now teaches at the conservatory of Rovigo in the Veneto.

One inescapable feature of the recording is a big, boomy, unnatural sound throughout the piano's registers. It's difficult to say if a poor choice of room, microphone placement or resonance-boosting technology is to blame. Whatever its aetiology, this sound ambience saturates smaller, delicately textured pieces like Rêverie and Une larme, making them seem waterlogged. Meanwhile, more robust, rhythmically punctuated works such as the big C sharp minor Scherzo, the Intermezzo in modo classico or 'The Great Gate of Kiev' sound as though they are issued from a cavern. One unfortunate result overall is that Scinardo's already limited dynamic palette and articulation strategies are rendered even more opaque. A lack of rhythmic pliancy robs some folk-inspired elements of spontaneity and abandon, while it lessens the affective intent in lyrical phrasing.

This release will probably hold greatest appeal for completists. If you're looking for a modern *Pictures*, you might check out the recordings of Alessio Bax and Steven Osborne.

#### **Patrick Rucker**

Pictures – selected comparisons: Osborne (3/13) (HYPE) CDA67896 Bax (10/15) (SIGN) SIGCD426

#### **Rachmaninov**

Rachmaninov Piano Sonatas - No 1, Op 28; No 2, Op 36 **Tchaikovsky** Lullaby, Op 16 No 1 (arr Rachmaninov)

Rustem Hayroudinoff pf
Onyx © ONYX4181 (67' • DDD)



For all their teeming surfaces, the Rachmaninov piano sonatas

don't have to be treated as virtuoso demonstration vehicles. Sane, dedicated, balanced playing such as that of Russianborn, London-based Rustem Hayroudinoff is always welcome, as is the clarity he brings to every texture. His own booklet essay, of which an expanded version is available online, testifies to the thought that has gone into his recordings, and his technical mastery is never in question.

What is more debatable is whether the emotional contrasts he generates are sufficient to support the grandeur of Rachmaninov's conceptions. There are undoubtedly verve and poetry here but I'm not sure they amount to communicative urgency or encompass such heightened states as desperation and craziness. It's partly a question of tone-colour, which in turn may be to do with the choice of instrument. Haroudinoff's voicing of the texture is always intelligent but it is never truly orchestral in its range. Everything gives the impression of being slightly muted: euphonious, to be sure, and never harsh, but at the same time slightly watercolour-ish.

Like many others, Hayroudinoff plays his own conflation of Rachmaninov's original and revised versions of the Second Sonata. Gordon Fergus-Thompson favours the 1913 original. More decisive is the fact that his sound is more resonant and bell-like: admittedly sometimes to the point of astringency, but very much painted in oils. His temperament is that bit wilder, his rubato more daring and his rhetoric more imperious. All this combines to give the feeling that there is more at stake in the music and that its ultimate victories are more genuinely hard-won.

Hayroudinoff's Tchaikovsky/ Rachmaninov *Lullaby* is a lovely makeweight. And if you lean towards a civilised Rachmaninov and react badly to animal intensity, maybe you will take this disc more eagerly to your heart than I do.

**David Fanning** 

Sonatas – selected comparison: Fergus-Thomson (6/89) (KING) KCLCD2007

#### **D** Scarlatti

'Sonatas, Vol 5'

Keyboard Sonatas - Kk28; Kk87; Kk124; Kk157; Kk205; Kk211; Kk238; Kk252; Kk253; Kk277; Kk388; Kk401; Kk474; Kk475; Kk547; Kk551

Pierre Hantaï hpd

Mirare © MIR326 (78' • DDD)



Pierre Hantai's discerning and unhurried stroll through selected

Scarlatti sonatas (the single-disc series began way back in 1993) here reaches a fifth release, and as usual is worth the wait. Playing a harpsichord after German models that is as clean as a whistle and combines a bright high register with strongly sonorous support down below, he brings crisp, precise fingerwork to bear while maintaining beguiling softness of hand and impressive control of speed and tone. Scarlatti is never a clatter with Hantaï, because when the notes are flying his quick technique always gives him time to let them sing.

One of the joys of Scarlatti's sonatas, as with Bach cantatas and Haydn symphonies, is that the fact that there are too many to grasp means that you always feel as if you are encountering something new. The 16 sonatas here put well-known ones alongside others that will be unfamiliar to many listeners, though of course peppered with original ideas and surprises. The 'discoveries' here include Kk547, with its brief, possibly deliberate references to Rameau's Les cyclopes; Kk475, opening in military fanfares, then releasing into delirious swirls; Kk28, enlivened by delightful trampoline leaps; Kk388, whose politely imitative opening lurches unexpectedly into something more suggestive of a street-cry; Kk277, a simple but exquisitely shaped Cantabile andantino similar in style and mood to the popular Kk208; and Kk205, each of whose halves opens in dignified 2/2 before shooting off into rockin' 6/8. The better-known sonatas include the broodingly melancholy Kk474, the haughtily Hispanic Kk238 and the gorgeous B minor Andante of Kk87, so loved by pianists. Hantaï's brisk way with the last may strike some of those pianists as lacking in Romantic sentiment but its essential lyricism is skilfully preserved nonetheless.

Seventy-eight minutes of harpsichord music by one composer is not always an easy listen but with Scarlatti and Hantaï it is an absolute pleasure to stay with.

Lindsay Kemp



Intelligence and technical mastery: Rustem Hayroudinoff recording Rachmaninov's two piano sonatas for Onyx

#### **Tchaikovsky**

Piano Sonata No 2, 'Grande sonate', Op 37.
The Seasons, Op 37*b*Nikolai Lugansky pf

Naïve ® AM215 (82' • DDD)



As Lugansky points out in his accompanying essay, Tchaikovsky's G major

Sonata and *The Seasons* fall under the same opus number (albeit thanks to his publishers rather than himself), and they each reveal with particular clarity his indebtedness to Schumann, whether in the chunky, near-obsessive textures of the Sonata or the intimacy of the 12 miniatures. That they are rarely (if ever?) coupled together may be to do with their combined duration of around 82 minutes.

Not surprisingly, Lugansky shows himself a master of Tchaikovskian drama and lyricism in equal measure. In the declamatory pages of the Sonata he never resorts to shouting in order to put his point across, while more intimate passages have an attractive speaking quality. Only Richter, perhaps, was able to sustain as much interest and flow in the highly repetitive gestures or to make as powerful a case for the structure as a whole. In Lugansky's hands the Scherzo is a wonder of clarity and the finale, while it may strike some as a little too étude-like for its own good, is nothing if not phenomenally articulate.

The Seasons is likewise delivered with consummate taste and understanding. Every nuance is scrupulously observed, and textures are coloured and orchestrated with sovereign mastery but also a sense of spontaneous delight. It's easy to imagine Russian pianists in 1873 opening their copy of the magazine *Le nouvelliste* each month and enjoying each new piece in this way.

Only towards the end does Lugansky slightly lose my sympathy: his 'October' is far slower than *Andante* (admittedly following a noble Russian tradition), and his 'November' is by no stretch of the imagination *Allegro moderato* (Kolesnikov is more natural here, though still very coy for *mezzo-forte*). A little slip in 'December' at bar 20 (0'20") should have been retaken (curiously Kolesnikov has what sounds like a soft-pedal glitch in the same piece, at 0'47").

For more imaginatively interpreted accounts of *The Seasons*, Pletnev and

Eschenbach definitely have the edge, and pianophiles shouldn't be without the admittedly elderly-sounding Igumnov. Staying with more mainstream pianism, such as Lugansky's or Kolesnikov's, do seek out Youri Egorov on YouTube (I'm open to correction, but I don't think this magical rendition ever found its way to LP or CD).

#### **David Fanning**

Seasons – selected comparisons:
Pletnev (12/94<sup>R</sup>) (ERAT/VIRG) 545042-2
Eschenbach (5/06) (ONDI) ODE1076-5
Igumnov, r1947 (1/08) (APR) APR5662
Kolesnikov (8/14) (HYPE) CDA68028
Sonata – selected comparison:
Richter (BMG) GD69048

#### Elisabeth Brauss

Beethoven Piano Sonata No 7, Op 10 No 3 Chopin Piano Sonata No 2, Op 35 Denhoff Étude de couleurs, Op 115<sup>a</sup> Prokofiev Piano Sonata No 2, Op 14 Elisabeth Brauss, aFabian Müller ρfs Oehms (© OC460 (75' • DDD)



This is apparently the debut recording of the remarkable young artist Elisabeth Brauss.

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### MARTIN PERRY

PIANO

"Dazzling...Perry commands both the lyricism and the virtuosity required" International Record Review



BRIDGE 9487

Paul Hindemith: Ludus Tonalis (1942) Hugo Weisgall: Sonata for Piano (1982)



BRIDGE 9390

#### Charles Ives

Second Piano Sonata "Concord, Mass., 1840-1860" (Final Kirkpatrick Edition)

Gordon Binkerd Essays for Piano IV, V, VI (1976)



BARTÓK

Constitution on 
Biographic on 
Biographic

**BRIDGE 9388** 

#### **Elliott Carter**

Piano Sonata 1945-46

#### Béla Bartók

Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs, op. 20

> Miklós Rózsa Piano Sonata, op. 20



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Born and trained in Hamburg, Brauss will be 22 this year, yet the maturity and sophistication of her thoughtful interpretations would be the pride of any pianist twice her age. In the last piece of her varied program, the *Étude de couleurs* for two pianos by the Bonn-based composer and cellist Michael Denhoff, Brauss is joined by Fabian Müller, demonstrating a lifelong commitment to chamber music.

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of this Beethoven D major Sonata is Brauss's immense stylistic assurance. The opening Presto is fleet-footed without sounding pressured or rushed. Details are given their full due, from fermatas held not a second too long to delicate equilibrium maintained in the smallest phrase. Every gesture seems imbued with meaning and the whole motivated by an abundance of joy, with sly wit twinkling through from time to time. The tragic scena unfolding during the course of the Largo e mesto has all the more impact for its classically proportioned restraint. Brauss prepares and builds the movement's climactic peak with consummate skill, lending the whispered final chords an all but unbearably desolate resignation. Never was a Minuet more welcome, and particularly this one with its exuberant Trio. The exquisite Rondo seems ebullient in the realisation that, the hard work accomplished, music may now run free.

Throughout the bristling rhythmic vitality, tricky voice-leading and constantly shifting harmonic colours of Prokofiev's Second Sonata, Brauss never loses sight of the composer's fundamental lyric impulse. She is also fully cognisant of the kinaesthetic sense that enabled Prokofiev to compose so effectively for the dance. When Prokofiev wants to raise a great noise, Brauss happily complies, just as, in the Scherzo for instance, she is able to generate a tightly wound, unstoppable motoric impulse. Embarking on the dark waters of the Andante is certainly mysterious but one feels a compass always at hand. Mocking parody and gaudy colours are woven into the circus antics of the finale, even as it scurries on its madcap course to an implacable cadence. Calling Brauss's Prokofiev civilised would imply that it is somehow tamed, which is not the case. Better said, it is Prokofiev without brutality.

This passionate B flat minor Sonata occasionally verges on despair, redeemed always by the eloquence of Chopin's rhetoric. The Scherzo's volte-face to the Trio is a small miracle of characterisation. When the Trio is recalled at the end of the

movement, it is suddenly recognisable as a portent of the Marche funèbre. Hushed restraint pervades that sad journey, funeral tolls heard from a distance. Out of this sombre cortège emanates a Trio that, in its ethereal poise, could be an aural avatar of Marie Taglioni's appearance at the Paris Opéra ballet as the first Sylphide. The *Presto* finale conjures an apparition, indifferent to all that has transpired, its flight more felt than glimpsed, until its final dive brings the sonata to a defiant conclusion.

It is rare to encounter this degree of instrumental mastery wed to musical depth and sensitivity in one so young. Brauss's exhilarating Beethoven is so thoroughly integrated that each movement is emotionally and spiritually amplified by what has gone before. Her original and unaffected Chopin-playing is fresh and a joy to listen to. If you find yourself uncertain about the future of the art of piano-playing, listening to Elisabeth Brauss could be the antidote. Patrick Rucker

### **Walter Gieseking**

'The Complete 1950s Solo Studio Recordings' **Brahms** Two Rhapsodies, Op 79. Piano Pieces - Op 76; Op 116; Op 117; Op 118; Op 119 **Chopin** Barcarolle, Op 60. Berceuse, Op 57 **Schubert** Impromptus - D899; D935. Moments musicaux, D780. Drei Klavierstücke, D946 **Schumann** Carnaval, Op 9. Kinderszenen, Op 15. Schlummerlied, Op 124 No 16. Vogel als Prophet, Op 82 No 7 **Scriabin** Poème, Op 32 No 1. Prelude, Op 15 No 4

Walter Gieseking pf APR (§ (4) APR7402 (4h 40' • ADD)



These aren't quite the 'complete' Walter Gieseking 1950s solo studio recordings of

**①** 

Brahms, Schubert and Schumann, in that the pianist's 1951 Schumann *Kinderszenen* (not to be confused with his 1940 traversal reissued by Arbiter) is omitted in favour of his 1955 remake. Still, most of the material has not been easy to source outside of Japan in a well-annotated, conscientiously transferred CD edition such as APR offers here.

Gieseking's enormous facility and stamina allowed him to record prolifically and expediently, which is not to say that everything comes off equally well. There's no questioning his seasoned classicism and purity of line throughout much of *Kinderszenen*; you'll rarely hear such an expansive, eloquently phrased and less mannered 'Traümerei' on disc. At the same

time, there are occasional ghosted notes and rushed beats ('Hasche-Mann', for example) absent from the earlier versions. Schumann's *Carnaval* teeters between impatience ('Pierrot' and 'Valse noble'), matter-of-factness ('Papillons') and full-bodied grandeur (the finale), missing the characterful consistency of the mono LP era's best versions, although Gieseking does play the forbidden 'Sphinxes', albeit nonchalantly.

Compared to the linear specificity and almost chamber-like repartee between the hands distinguishing Wilhelm Kempff's mono-era late Brahms, Gieseking sometimes barnstorms his way through thicker, more ambitious pieces, and not articulating the whirling figurations thoughtfully: take Op 79 No 1's lurching accelerandos or Op 118 No 1's poor voiceleading as two telltale examples. Yet some of the lyrical, more introspective works represent a captivating fusion of Gieseking's subtle colour palette and poetic impulses, such as in the texturally threedimensional Op 118 No 6 or an achingly probing account of Op 119 No 1. And the three Op 117 Intermezzos sound even more luminous and cultivated than I remember from my childhood American Columbia vinyl LP copy.

Gieseking's intimately scaled, classically orientated Schubert Impromptus will sound relatively lightweight compared with the Schnabel version's tensile dynamism. The same analogy applies to the Drei Klavierstücke, measuring Gieseking alongside EMI rival Claudio Arrau's massive, more rhetorical vantage point. In and of themselves, however, one marvels at the sheer evenness of Gieseking's rippling scales and rotary patterns, and with very little help from the sustain pedal. Gieseking paces the G flat Impromptu in a true alla breve tempo and incorporates the now discredited change in harmony on the fourth beat of measure five (Gieseking's own edited Urtext score for Henle avoids this bowdlerisation).

Once past a slightly foursquare C major opening, the remaining five Schubert *Moments musicaux* find Gieseking more involved and focused. Notice the F minor's minuscule gradations in touch and just a dash of rubato. By contrast, No 5's *pianissimo* section presses forward with an angular urgency that evokes, you guessed it, Schnabel! In a world infiltrated by unbearably slow readings of No 6, Gieseking's genuine *Allegretto* is both a corrective and a relief.

You would think that an incandescent Debussy interpreter such as Gieseking would make magic out of the Chopin

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Berceuse's tracery, but his correct yet rather dull interpretation never really comes to life. Nor does the Barcarolle, for the most part; Gieseking's pre-war version on 78s is far more shapely and inspired. The little Scriabin pieces neither add to nor detract from Gieseking's recorded legacy.

From what I infer, sonically speaking, Al Lesitsky's transfers appear to be effected from mint or near-mint LP pressings that are either comparable or marginally superior to long-out-of-print Japanese EMI CD editions, save for the Schubert *Klavierstücke*, which sound slightly drier and more compressed. Does APR have plans to reissue Gieseking's complete 1950s solo Beethoven? Jed Distler

### 'Attraction'

**B Hamilton** Interzones **Pärt** For Anna Maria. Variations for the Healing of Arinushka **Psathas** One Study One Summary **Séjourné** Attraction **A Thomas** Merlin **Xenakis** Rebonds A & B **Christoph Sietzen** *perc* 

Genuin (F) GEN17455 (65' • DDD)



Percussionists, and percussion recitals, are hardly uncommon these days but, with

'Attraction', Christoph Sietzen has put together a collection of pieces, centred on the marimba, that works well as an overall sequence. Not that these pieces consistently hold the attention; Emmanuel Séjourné provides a title-track whose likely visual appeal is not matched by its busy though inconsequential content. Xenakis's diptych remains a modern classic by dint of a methodical understatement which Sietzen realises with keen elegance, while Andrew Thomas has come up with an engaging addition to the ever more abundant repertoire for solo marimba such as emphasises colouristic over timbral or textural qualities. Bruce Hamilton and John Psathas may be exact contemporaries (both turned 50 last year), but their percussion-writing could hardly be more different: Hamilton favours a distinctly abstract approach where vibraphone and tape merge into a seamless if monochrome continuum, whereas Psathas juxtaposes his marimba with 'junk percussion' and tape backdrop whose tangibly jazz overtones provide a semblance of narrative in this absorbing two-part concept with its insinuating atmosphere.

Genuin's recording is a model of how to present music for percussion within a spacious yet believable acoustic, and Sietzen provides a succinctly informative booklet note. Also found here are arrangements of miniatures by Arvo Pärt, the artless poise of *For Anna Maria* and halting eloquence of *Variations for the Healing of Arinushka*, both realised with conviction. Maybe Pärt will yet write an original piece for this most questing of younger percussionists. **Richard Whitehouse** 

### 'Back to Bach'

'Tributes and Transcriptions'

JS Bach/Busoni Chaconne. Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ. Nun komm der Heiden Heiland JS Bach/Rachmaninov Suite from the Solo Violin Partita No 3, BWV1006 Liszt Fantasia and Fugue on B-A-C-H, S529. Variations on a Theme by Bach, 'Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen', S180 Kenneth Hamilton pf

Prima Facie F PFCD061 (58' • DDD)



It's a good idea to read Kenneth Hamilton's booklet before you listen to his disc. Not

just because he is a fine writer, as readers of his *After the Golden Age* (OUP: 2008 – 6/08) will know, but because it provides a useful heads-up for some performance and textural decisions.

For instance: Hamilton has read several arcane publications that record Liszt's performance advice for Variations on 'Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen', comments which, he notes, 'seem to have been ignored in the subsequent recording history of the piece'. Again, if you had not read Hamilton's booklet you might wonder why, in the Bach-Busoni Chaconne, some harmonies are changed (at 6'40"-7'08") and the final bar is played as bare octave Ds in both hands rather than the conventional chord: Hamilton tells us he follows (mostly) the 1916 text, Busoni's final version of several, with some variants gleaned from a 1915 piano roll.

But this is no lecture-recital disc. In the two Liszt transcriptions that bookend the programme, Hamilton uninhibitedly exploits the full dynamic range of the piano (a fine Hamburg Steinway with a crystalline upper treble), rattling the lower bass strings to thrilling effect as he creates the organlike sonority necessary to convey the full majesty of Liszt's writing. Where the command is tempestuoso, Hamilton is happy to oblige. In the Chaconne, too, he takes no prisoners in a reading which more than fulfils Busoni's conceptual grandeur (its dedicatee, Eugen d'Albert, hated it), a quasi organo reading as opposed to the bravura piano solo in the hands of Michelangeli or

Benjamin Grosvenor. In the two Bach-Busoni chorales Hamilton shows another side of his artistry, singing their longbreathed lines to perfection.

Despite his admirably clear voicing and a lightening of touch and tone, I was less taken with the three movements from the E major Violin Partita in which Bach meets Rachmaninov, Mendelssohn and Godowsky. Hamilton seems overemphatic, too keen to make a point, especially in the Gavotte. Here I prefer the airier, more buoyant approach of Hannes Minnaar (Cobra, 1/14). Nonetheless a most rewarding recital from a pianist who merits far wider attention. Jeremy Nicholas

### 'Fantasien'

CPE Bach Fantasie, Wq67 H300 Beethoven Phantasie, Op 77 Brahms Piano Pieces, Op 116 Schubert Wanderer-Fantasie, D760 Anna Tsybuleva pf

Champs Hill (F) CHRCD131 (68' • DDD)



Piano fantasias may have started off as essentially improvisational in

nature, yet the genre evolved into something less clearly defined, more allembracing. Consider the four large-scale opuses put together for this 'all fantasies' programme. Schubert's *Wanderer* Fantasy, for example, provided the template for continuous single-movement sonatas such as the Liszt B minor, the later Scriabin sonatas and so on. The seven short pieces encompassing Brahms's Op 116 are short and concisely structured. Only the opening CPE Bach and Beethoven compositions are fantasies in the word's purest sense.

More importantly, however, these compositions add up to a well-contrasted and stimulating totality, abetted by Anna Tsybuleva's superb pianism and intelligent musicianship. Her sense of timing and innate feeling for shaping grand, impulsive gestures effectively accentuate Bach's volatile creativity and unpredictable harmonic detours. Rather than pounce upon the Beethoven's opening downward declamatory scales, Tsybuleva delineates them with care. In due course her playing becomes looser and less fettered, yet a thoughtful presence is always felt.

Tsybuleva forcefully launches into the Schubert, keeping the composer's *con fuoco* directive in mind. She relaxes just a smidgen for the lyrical E major theme, yet keeps the textures crisp through her spare



Darkly expressive: Matthew Wadsworth offers a ravishing programme that showcases the lute's subtle gradations of tone and timbre

pedalling, while taking the climactic octaves in effortless stride. The *Adagio* variations benefit from a strong left-hand presence and as little expressive lily-gilding as possible. The fugal finale is consistently clear and avoids building too much too soon, although a little more drive and ferocity à la Richter, Fleisher or (more recently) Primakov wouldn't have hurt.

In the Brahms group, Tsybuleva brings shapeful specificity to the long lines as they cross from one register to the next, justifying her terse pacing for the E major Intermezzo and an A minor Intermezzo that might sound too deliberate in less knowing hands. The sound may be a tad diffuse but it conveys palpable concert-hall realism. Jed Distler

### 'Late Night Lute'

Dowland A Dream (Lady Leighton's Pavan).
Fortune my foe. Mr Dowland's Midnight.
Sir John Langton's Pavan Goss The Miller's Tale
R Johnson Two Almaynes. Pavan in C minor
Kapsberger Passacaglia Piccinini Corrente
terza. Partite variate sopra quest-aria francese
d'etta l'alemana. Toccata VI Rosseter Prelude
Matthew Wadsworth lute/theorbo
Deux-Elles ® DXL1175 (52' • DDD)



Waking from a troubling dream late one night, I looked to lutenist

Matthew Wadsworth's exquisite new recording for solace. It was an extraordinary experience, listening to the music of long-dead masters of an archaic instrument - Rosseter, Dowland, Johnson, Piccinini and Kapsberger in that languid, half-awake state where fancy reigns. But it is the music of one very much alive master, guitarist and composer Stephen Goss, that holds the key to entering that same state, regardless of time and mood. Commissioned by guitarist John Williams for Wadsworth, Goss's The Miller's Tale for solo theorbo was completed in 2015 and received its premiere by Wadsworth earlier this year. Despite the antiquity and ribald nature of its inspiration, one of the most well-loved stories in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, its mood is one of wistful melancholy; its language too

is closer to that of the latter two Baroque composers mentioned above.

Wadsworth places *The Miller's Tale* between Johnson and Dowland's Elizabethan and Jacobean ruminations for lute and Piccinini and Kapsberger's stylistically divergent yet darkly expressive essays for theorbo. In doing so, he creates a musical penumbra which mirrors that somnolent condition to which I previously referred while providing a bridge from one world – ours – to another, and then another again.

The playing in this little theatre of shadows is of course ravishing throughout, with Wadsworth again demonstrating his appreciation of the lute's propensity for subtle gradations of tone and timbre. That he ends with two of Dowland's most profound utterances, thus making us end where we began, is further testament to his refined sensibility.

William Yeoman

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# Brian Elias

A culturally diverse upbringing and an idealistic mindset have resulted in a special contemporary voice, writes **Stephen Plaistow** 

Brian Elias was born in Bombay (modern Mumbai) and will be 70 in August next year. He was 13 when he first came to England and was in his early twenties when I got to know him through his teacher and mentor Elisabeth Lutyens; at the time he had just written *La chevelure* (1967), a setting of Baudelaire for solo voice and orchestral ensemble. Webern is a model but the Elias voice is there. It is the first work he acknowledges.

With his childhood in Bombay and ancestral roots in the ancient Jewish community in Baghdad and a long creative life in London, he has experienced a wider diversity of cultural, religious and musical tradition than most of us will ever know. English is his mother tongue, though he is bilingual in Hindi and retains a smattering of Arabic. His general education in India was entirely Western, apart from having to study Hindi and Marathi in school, and some Hebrew at home. After being taught by nuns and Jesuits, he attended The Cathedral, an Anglo-Scottish foundation in Bombay which he calls a 'Boxwallah's Eton', vividly described by his fellow pupil and near contemporary Salman Rushdie in *Midnight's Children*.

# 'A piece has to have a reason for its existence and should be written out of real need, not simply to fill up paper'

'I do not come from a musical background, and despite being in India I was never trained in Indian classical music, something I regret deeply. However I did from infancy hear a wonderful kaleidoscope of sound and music – from the Arabic songs and Hebrew prayers of my Iraqi-Jewish grandparents, to the endless variety of folk music, festivals and prayers of the greatly varied ethnic and religious communities in Bombay, the calls of street vendors, hideously amplified Bollywood songs in every street, the baffling number of languages and dialects spoken everywhere – the list is endless and all these things, more than any formal training I have had, are what I think of as my musical psyche'.

As a student in London, he deliberately ignored his heritage in his attempts to acquire a European technique and discipline. 'At first, I developed a kind of 12-tone technique that was heavily influenced by Webern, even though I was more attracted by Berg's lyricism and the energy and fantasy of works such as Schoenberg's *Erwartung* and *Pierrot lunaire*. And of course I heard all the contemporary music I could – the 1960s was a very exciting time'.

In 1967 the individuality and polish of *La chevelure* were noticed with enthusiasm, and in the 50 years since, Elias has produced, on average, one piece a year. Quoting Auden with

### ELIAS FACTS

Born Bombay, August 30, 1948
Education The Cathedral,
Bombay; St Christopher's
School, Letchworth; Royal
College of Music, London.
Studied composition
with Humphrey Searle
and Bernard Stevens at
RCM, and privately with
Elisabeth Lutyens.

**Career** Spent several years as a statistician for a finance company before returning to music full-time in 1979.

**Early work** *La chevelure*, for soprano and chamber orchestra, premiered in 1969 at the RCM, with Jane Manning as soloist.

**Breakthrough work** *L'Eylah*, for orchestra, was Elias's first BBC commission, premiered at the Proms in 1984 by the BBC Philharmonic and Edward Downes.

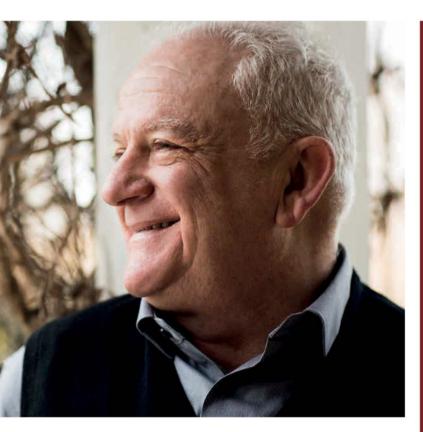


approval: 'Ariel sings because he must, Prospero, because he can', he will not be shaken from the position that 'a piece has to have a reason for its existence and should be written out of real need, not simply to fill up paper or fulfil a commission. He likes too ETA Hoffmann's warning: 'Great mischief could be caused in the realm of art through mistaking a strong external stimulus for a true inner calling'. It was an attitude that enraged Elisabeth Lutyens, who used to refer to Elias as a mandarin.

Testing the ground every inch of the way, the 1970s had periods of reflection and even withdrawal from composition entirely. On an NMC compilation (NMCD025, 10/95), a virtuoso setting of Robert Browning's *Peroration* for unaccompanied voice, composed in 1973, is an example of what he was capable of as a burgeoning vocal – and theatrical – composer. Paul Griffiths has called it a Berio-esque essay, and so it is, but Elias has made something original, and you do not think of him as looking over his shoulder as you listen, but rather of a man of our time treading a path of discovery.

He demands the best of himself and expects it from others. It is without a feeling of compromise that he applauds the force of Boulez's imperative that one should burn the library of the past every day, before starting to write, while recognizing that this is not wholly realistic, even for Boulez.

Looking at the Elias work list, the 1970s and 1980s are not short of music that offers pleasure and surprises in the revisiting. They are by no means all miniatures either, though vocal composition predominates. Five Pieces for right hand (1969), marks the first appearance of Elias in print. The harp and the hurdy-gurdy turn up with the voice as well as the piano, the hurdy-gurdy not out of the Auvergne or Transylvania but a guest from the Indian street, where Elias remembers it was sometimes referred to by the British as a ting-a-dee. There is Sylvia Plath and Mervyn Peake as well as William Blake (Proverbs of Hell, for unaccompanied chorus, 1975), and Verlaine together with the Roman Petronius who was set by Elias in 1979 for tenor and orchestra in Somnia,



his first work of such scope and ambition since *La chevelure*. His first BBC commission and performance at the Proms (1984) was for *L'Eylah* ('to transcend', from the Kaddish), and a breakthrough, an orchestral work for an occasion that has never daunted this increasingly assured composer since that time. He knows what he's doing and what he wants to do, and he doesn't disappoint. *L'Eylah* seemed every bit as good when it had a second performance but it still awaits a recording.

'The Composer Speaks' was the title of a lecture Elias prepared to give at the Oxford Faculty of Music nearly 15 years ago but never gave because of last-minute illness. In it, there's a good deal about his early studies and development of a technique that uses small cells or groups of notes, the concern always that the material should be at the service of his intuition, rather than the other way around – 'it's a long time', Elias says, 'since I permitted my musical material to dictate the direction that the music should take'.

'Rhythm is also an essential tool and I depend on it greatly as a means of communicating my ideas ... I cannot now imagine writing pitches down without giving equal consideration to rhythm, and of creating form and structure without giving similar and equal thought to short and longterm rhythm and rhythmic structure ... Each situation makes its own demands. It was while thinking about finding some kind of consistent approach to rhythm that I came across the writings of Aristoxenus, a Greek philosopher and musical theorist [born between 375 and 360BC]. I found his theories a gold mine of ideas expressed with the utmost clarity and some of them turned out to be wonderful models. Like other writers of his day, he tells that "a mere succession of shorter and longer notes was not recognised as providing a rhythm to which we could respond". In the often difficult search for a means of communication, this is a valuable lesson that too many people ignore. Aristoxenus developed his theories by linking music with dance and poetry and their rhythmic techniques, and it is this unified approach with all its divisions of function, style

## GRAMOPHONE EDITOR'S CHOICE "The best new classical albums - July 2017"



Bach-Busoni: Chaconne • Chopin: Polonaise-fantaisie, Op. 61 Franck: Prelude Chorale and Fugue Schumann: Sonata in G minor, Op.22 VAIA 1284

I first encountered the cultivated and masterful pianism of Alberto Reyes on a hard-to-find 1995 Connoisseur Society release devoted to Liszt's Verdi Paraphrases, and later had the pleasure of reviewing his all-Schumann double CD set in these pages (6/11). His newest release may be his best yet. Unlike certain pianists who view the Bach-Busoni Chaconne as a virtuoso display piece in and of itself, Reyes's patiently expansive rendition adds up to a masterclass in how to build assiduous climaxes, how to intelligently scale one's dynamics and how to balance the massive textures in sonorously judicious proportions. [...]

—Jed Distler, Gramophone

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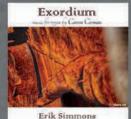
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### **New Releases**



### **KAROL SZYMANOWSKI: PIANO WORKS**

BARBARA KARAŚKIEWICZ Preludes, etudes, masques, and mazurkas from perhaps the most important Polish composer. Divine Art dda 25151



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Champs Hill Records



STOLEN RHYTHM works by **CHERYL** FRANCES-HOAD

RPS Award-winning British composer Cheryl Frances-Hoad's fourth disc with Champs Hill Records includes chamber, orchestral, and solo piano works inspired by composers from the past.

With Nicholas Daniel (oboe), David Cohen (cello) and Rambert Orchestra conducted by Paul Hoskins

"a voice overflowing not only with ideas, but also with the discipline and artistry necessary to harness them. The Scotsman

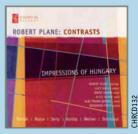
#### **AVAILABLE SOON**



### FRANZ SCHUBERT: DER EINSAME ILKER ARGAYÜREK

The debut recording from current BBC New Generation Artist, the tenor Ilker Arcayürek with Simon Lepper, piano.

"Schubert and the feeling of solitude have been my companions for many years. We can find ourselves alone as the result of many different circumstances in life unhappiness in love, a bereavement, or simply moving to another country. For me, however, being alone has never meant being 'lonely'.' Ilker Arcayürek



### **ROBERT PLANE: CONTRASTS**

A highly spiced collection of Hungarian music by Bartok, Rozsa, Weiner, Dohnanyi and Kurtag from acclaimed clarinettist Robert Plane, including a world premiere recording of a piece by Tibor Serly. With Lucy Gould (violin), Alice Neary (cello), Benjamin Frith (piano), David Adams (viola) and Alec Frank-Gemmill (horn).

"This album serves as a snapshot of the music of an evocative land; a language that seems to suit the characteristics of the clarinet particularly well." Robert Plane

### Champs Hill Records

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www.champshillrecords.co.uk

and purpose that I found so very instructive, if only because it helped to put so many things in place for me.

'At first, I wrote a couple of pieces using some of these ancient theories directly – building up verse structures and poetic forms, using poetic feet in the same way that the Greeks would have used them to express not only rhythm but character and ethos.' *Geranos* (1985) is one of these, composed for the Fires of London, and it's included on an NMC release reviewed in *Gramophone* last month (NMCD235). If you're looking for a first-class studio recording as your own Elias entry point, I suggest you couldn't do better.

Go on next from *Geranos* to the *Five Songs to poems by Irina Ratushinskaya*, a BBC Symphony Orchestra commission. It came to the Proms in 1991 and was also toured; it was received everywhere with acclaim. The powerful image of resistance, the acceptance of shattering realities and the fantasies of different kinds of escape made poetry of urgency and truly universal significance.

On the NMC recording (NMCD064), the pairing is with *Laments*, which has origins in his childhood experiences. The text uses funeral laments set in Grico, a language from Salento on the heel of Italy that is mostly Greek, but heavily influenced by Italian. These poems were sung by professional mourners and were an essential part of ritualized mourning processes. 'Before writing the piece, I dreamed a lot about these mourning women, and the clarinet solo in the coda also came to me complete in a dream. This solo is the progenitor of much of the material of the work. I really believe in using all my experiences, and one would have to be mad to ignore gifts such as these.'

Mourning, raging, defiance, lamenting: do not judge these to be the limits of Elias's preferred world. The other NMC compilation I recommend (NMCD173) provides other perspectives, and Gerard McBurney's booklet essay has pertinent observations: 'What is so immediately striking is his feeling for surging drama. A recurring feature is the way in which symphonic gestures swirl and rise like waves and shake their crests with a flourish before falling back and yielding to the next in line. This is what gives his art its narrative power, its restless forward motion. He is a natural storyteller.' What gives structure and sense to Elias's waves of sound is not merely the music's rise and fall, but his fondness for one of the most ancient structures in music – call and refrain.

In *The House that Jack Built*, Elias draws on the late Peter and Iona Opie's revelations about the shape and significance of traditional English nursery rhymes and playground games, to create a nightmare vision of innocence assaulted by experience. In *A Talisman*, an ancient Jewish text of intense personal significance offers an emotional starting point from which to explore dramatic antiphonies between soloist and chamber orchestra. And in *Doubles*, the composer not only delights in the symphonic possibilities of 'call and refrain' from bar to bar, but makes the entire work depend on this same idea, by treating three movements as 'calls' and three others as 'echoes' or 'responses'.

The Jerusalem Quartet are playing the String Quartet of 2012 a good deal and must surely record it; likewise Nicholas Daniel and the Britten Sinfonia with the more recent Oboe Quintet. And at long last the Royal Ballet are reviving *The Judas Tree* this autumn (October 24 to November 1) as part of commemorations to mark the 25th anniversary of Sir Kenneth MacMillan's death. It was the last ballet he choreographed.

Deborah MacMillan had heard the premiere of the Ratushinskaya songs: out of her enthusiasm she told her

husband to listen to it. 'It was a wonderful stroke of luck,' Elias recalls, 'for I had always wanted to write for dance. With Diaghilev-like initiative, and great imagination, MacMillan wanted me to write him a proper work; rather than providing me with a scenario, we simply agreed a very broad dramatic structure. He did not want to take the risk that a detailed scenario (such as those given to Tchaikovsky) would result in my writing 'film music'. Writing specifically for dance is quite different to writing for the concert hall. Dancers and choreographers respond well to strong rhythm, but that rhythm need not always be an ostinato or a pulse, or even a direct beat! They are most sophisticated in the way they learn and memorise music in huge spans, and I learned a very great deal about musical continuity from watching this process; writing for dance, for the theatre, in its turn, has also taught me much about writing for the concert hall'.

To talk of the best of new music forming part of 'a vital repertory' marks me down as a dinosaur, I don't doubt, but I do believe this is wonderful stuff. And being a composer, a real one, as opposed to a good musician who likes to write something now and then, is of course a lifetime's work. They continue to bring up the last of the queue, after everyone else has been paid and attended to; but it was ever thus. **G**Brian Elias's Cello Concerto receives its world premiere at the Proms on August 9, available on BBC iPlayer for 30 days

### BRIAN ELIAS ON RECORD

Explore Elias's music - as described by the composer



Five Songs to Poems of Irina Ratushinskaya. Laments Mary King *mez* 

Catherine Wyn-Rogers *mez* BBC Singers; BBC Symphony Orchestra / Martyn Brabbins; Tadaaki Otaka

NMC ® NMCD064

'The powerful imagery of resistance, the acceptance of shattering realities and the fantasies of different kinds of escape made poetry of truly universal significance and urgency, and the idea of a setting for voice and large orchestra followed immediately.'



The House that Jack Built. A Talisman. Doubles Tim Mirfin bass

BBC Symphony Orchestra / Andrew Davis; Martyn Brabbins; Jiří Bělohlávek

NMC ® NMCD173

'The playground and all its rumbustiousness rather than

the more gentle nursery is the setting for The House That Jack Built. The moment to moment construction attempts to mimic the furious and manic activity of the playground with its rapid succession of games, chants, calls, jeers, taunts and jibes all repeated frequently at random.'



Geranos. Meet me in the Green Glen. Once did I breathe another's breath.

#### **Electra Mourns**

Roderick Williams bar Susan Bickley mez lain Burnside pf Nicholas Daniel cor anglais Psappha; Britten Sinfonia / Nicholas Kok; Clark Rundell

NMC © NMCD235

'The first four songs [of Once did I breathe another's breath] are concerned with some of the happier aspects of being in love, while the final song regrets that the splendour and bliss of love cannot last: it wanes like the "full-orbed" moon.'

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# Vocal



## Hugo Shirley on the final volume of Hyperion's Strauss songs series:

'Rebecca Evans makes a supremely eloquent and musical case for the Four Last Songs − a deeply moving performance' ► REVIEW ON PAGE 77



### Alexandra Coghlan listens to plainchant from The Fraternity:

It's not a performance to win any awards but its directness and sincerity sets it apart from professional alternatives' > REVIEW ON PAGE 81

### **JS Bach**

'The Complete Solo Soprano Cantatas, Vol 1' Cantatas - No 82a, Ich habe genug; No 202, Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten; No 210, O holder Tag, erwünschte Zeit Gillian Keith sop

Armonico Consort / Christopher Monks
Signum (F) SIGCD488 (71' • DDD • T/t)



This mini-series of cantatas for solo soprano encompasses nine works of

exceptional quality and variety, the initial volume of three masterpieces – in no particular order – displaying both Bach's special affinity to this attractive subgenre of cantata and Gillian Keith's profoundly incisive and intelligent singing. Underpinning these telling vocal excursions is an unaffected simplicity of utterance in the accompanying role of the Armonico Consort. If occasionally a touch under-inflected, the ensemble speaks as one with intimacy around Keith's focused timbre and quicksilver diction.

Bach's own later transposition of *Ich habe* genug for soprano and flute still takes some acclimatisation for those wedded to the baritone version; the benefit of this scoring, when performed with such sensitivity to text and lightness of texture, is that it never falls into the saccharine trap to which the original has too often become prey. This reading is indeed as satisfying as any I've heard (in which flautist Eva Caballero deserves special mention), and with a radiant and freshly minted 'Schlummert ein'. If Weichet nur is less polished than the framing works, and cannot rival the luxuriance of Carolyn Sampson's recent recording in her soprano Weimar cantatas with the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra (Harmonia Mundi, 7/17), the dialogue between singer and oboist is joyfully immediate right through to the delectable bounce of the final gavotte.

The jewel in the crown here is the late and woefully under-appreciated wedding

cantata, O holder Tag. Over half an hour the soprano is put through her paces in a compendium of technical pyrotechnics and expressive conceits. This could be made for Gillian Keith as she traverses the filigree with seasoned panache and always gloriously instinctive textual nuancing. This version may not have the instrumental flair in Carolyn Sampson or Dorothea Röschmann's readings but Keith's contains a communicative reach into the sinews of Bach's music which is rare indeed. 'Seid beglückt' – a virtuoso valediction for the young married ones - is rattled off with exhilarating and pinpoint aplomb and is worth the price of the disc alone.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

### JS Bach

'Secular Cantatas, Vol 8 - Celebratory Cantatas' Cantatas - No 206, Schleicht, spielende Wellen, und murmelt gelinde; No 215, Preise dein Glücke, gesegnetes Sachsen

Hana Blažíková sop Hiroya Aoki counterten Charles Daniels ten Roderick Williams bass Bach Collegium Japan / Masaaki Suzuki BIS 🖹 🕮 BIS2231 (70' • DDD • T/t)



As Masaaki Suzuki and his experienced Japanese colleagues traverse the remaining

secular cantatas in the series, the question arises as to why Bach's occasional pieces sound distinctly 'unsacred'. History tells us that the musical texts are largely interchangeable – Bachians won't be surprised to hear the opening trumpet-led chorus of No 206 as the prototype to the 'Osanna' of the Mass in B minor – and yet these two wonderful celebratory works seem to impart layers of worldly delights which fall squarely outside the liturgical rhetoric. Bach certainly draws on refined, balletic elegance in his later works – the 1730s and '40s, when the majority of his secular cantatas were composed.

Richly detailed nuances in scoring and melodic character emerge in these

dedicatory works, in this case a panegyric for Elector August II, where investment of creative energy and resources might still bring the composer reputational dividends. So Bach brings, as ever, a loftier meaning to the usual insipid commissioned texts. Schleicht, spielende Wellen ('Flow, playful waves and murmur') follows the dramma per musica template of allegory – this time with four competing rivers yearning for the primacy of the monarch's affections. However ludicrous, Bach constructs a very significant work which Suzuki treats as an undertaking of serious critical engagement.

Both the gentleness and ecstatic immediacy of Bach's rich imagery become apparent at the outset and each movement is performed at a compellingly high level. The liquid and brilliantly projected bass-singing of Roderick Williams is simply majestic in 'Schleuss des Janustempels Türen'. The pure gold lies at the end when the River Pleisse, sung by the bright but deeply responsive soprano Hana Blažíková, requests each river to act its age 'with undivided concord and sweet harmony'. The 'choir' of three flutes, each with their dovetailing and courtly roulades, does the trick. The voicing of this late Bach canvas is simply exquisite.

Preise dein Glücke is no less strikingly delivered, again an Augustian homage but with more of a consistently extrovert swagger. There's a grand 'rage' aria -Williams again in his element - but the pièce de résistance is Bach's party piece of unalloyed sycophancy, the tenor aria 'Freilich trotzt Augustus' Name' (whose name speaks of noble lines of gods and defying mortality, no less!). Tenor Charles Daniels may not have the glorious bounce or spontaneous timbral gear-shifts of the young Ian Partridge for Ernst Ansermet but his reading is full of delights and the coloratura as exemplary as ever. After 22 years of intensive Bach recording, Suzuki and his forces just seem to get better.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

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Simply exquisite: Masaaki Suzuki and his forces excel in Bach's celebratory cantatas

#### **Dove**

My Love is Mine. Five Am'rous Sighs. All the Future Days. Cut My Shadow. Nights Not Spent Alone. All You Who Sleep Tonight **Kitty Whately** mez **Simon Lepper** pf

Champs Hill © CHRCD125 (71' • DDD • T)



For her second solo album, the British mezzo Kitty Whately has set down

authoritative accounts of what is billed as the 'complete works for mezzo-soprano' by Jonathan Dove. These consist of five songcycles, prefaced by the unaccompanied and ultra-sensuous 'My Love is Mine' of 1997 (words from the Song of Songs), a superb mini-scena in its own right. Also from that year are the Five Am'rous Sighs, whose superficial, syllabic simplicity belies an acute sensitivity and ability to switch moods on a bar line. The fourth song, 'All these dismal looks', stands out for its bouncing freshness. The whole set is engaging and definitely faces towards North American models (Barber and Copland spring to mind).

Dove joins an illustrious parade of composers who have set Ursula Vaughan

Williams's verses. All the Future Days (composed in 2004) makes greater demands on the pianist, especially in 'The Siren'. Here – as on the rest of the disc – Simon Lepper is on fantastic form. He clearly relishes the poundingly angry Latin American/Bernsteinian inflections of the outer songs of the three Federico García Lorca settings of Cut My Shadow.

The CD's title-cycle, Nights Not Spent Alone, was a BBC Radio 3 commission for Whately. There is a strong flavour of Britten in these Edna St Vincent Millay settings, especially in the first song, 'Recuerdo'. Whately is at her most vividly dramatic in the concluding, soaring 'I too beneath your moon'.

All You Who Sleep Tonight (1996) was composed for Nuala Willis, an important muse for Dove. Vikram Seth's taut verses receive a variety of pithy treatments: the cheeky 'Prandial Plaint', the timeless 'Dark Road' and the hypnotic 'Night Watch' are just three further highlights on this beautifully crafted disc.

We can only hope that following this outstanding release Dove will not avoid future opportunities to write mezzo-soprano song-cycles.

Malcolm Riley

### Eisler

Ändere die Welt, sie braucht es. An die Überlebenden. Ballade vom Baum und den Ästen. Die Ballade vom Soldaten. Die Ballade vom Wasserrad, Op 45 No 11. Bankenlied, Op 48 No 1. Chorlied von der nützlichen Missetat. Deutsches Lied 1937, 'Marie, weine nicht'. Einheitsfront-Lied. Grabrede für einen Genossen. In die Städte kam ich. Kuppellied. Lied der Mariken, Lied der Nanna, Das Lied vom Anstreicher Hitler, Das Lied vom SA-Mann, Lied von der belebenden Wirkung des Geldes. Lob des Lernens. Oh Falladah, die du da hangest. Der Rauber und sein Knecht. Schlussballade. Sklave, wer wird dich befreien. Solidaritatslied, Op 27 No 1. Die Spaziergänge. Stempellied, Op 28 No 6. Das 'Vielleicht'-Lied. Wenn der Igel in der Abendstunde

Holger Falk bar Steffen Schleiermacher pf Dabringhaus und Grimm ® MDG613 2001-2 (76' • DDD • T)



Hanns Eisler's songs have been reasonably well represented on disc, not least with

high-profile recordings from Matthias Goerne (including the *Hollywood Songbook* – Decca, 1/99). But this new album from

gramophone.co.uk

MDG inaugurates what looks to be an important new four-volume survey of his vocal output, with the pianist Steffen Schleiermacher at the helm. It covers the key period of 1929 to 1937 during which the composer proved a master of the political song – many following a standard pattern by alternating melancholy self-reflection with righteous anger. All but a couple of the numbers here are settings of texts by Brecht.

I was expecting it to be quite a lot to swallow in one go – the programme is a generous one – but found myself happily listening all the way through at the first sitting. Eisler never lets his material get weighed down or portentous, and it's all leavened by a good dose of dark Berlin humour, some subtle (the swaggering 'Kuppellied' includes sly *Tristan* quotations), some not so subtle (such as in the broad satire of 'Das Lied vom Anstreicher Hitler').

There's no disguising Eisler's knack for melody (in the lovely, nostalgic 'Lied der Nanna' for example), or his skill in adding delicious harmonic colour to material that could end up slightly monochrome. Though it's a sound world in some ways familiar from the better-known Weill, we also hear hints of Wolf at his most biting and, in the thoughtful piano postludes, echoes of Schumann. There's a good deal of Mahler, too, whose Wunderhorn pacifism feels here as though it's being dragged into the dark heart of the 20th century.

All the songs receive terrific performances. Holger Falk has a clear, cleanly focused baritone that can run the gamut from a honeyed *piano* to something more like an impassioned shout (such as in the unrelenting 'Das Lied vom SA-Mann'); he even has to deliver some lines in 'Lob des Lernens' through a megaphone. There's also an ideal balance between sophistication and rawness, a certain neutrality of interpretation that will bear repeated listening but doesn't betray the gritty roots of the music.

As Schleiermacher explains in a generous booklet essay, the songs were written with a variety of accompaniments in mind, but he brings them all to fiery life at the piano. MDG's sound is excellent. One real shame is that the texts are only in German. It would be a shame if that fact put anyone off this fascinating and hugely enjoyable disc. Hugo Shirley

### **Elgar**

The Dream of Gerontius, Op 38

Catherine Wyn-Rogers mez

Andrew Staples ten Thomas Hampson bar

RIAS Chamber Choir; Berlin State Opera Chorus;

Staatskapelle Berlin / Daniel Barenboim

Decca (M) ② 483 1585DH (94' • DDD • T)



There is probably no such thing as the perfect *Gerontius*. Every recording is

flawed in some way. Even the classic (and glorious) Barbirolli has Kim Borg's misshapen vowels to contend with. But the inspirational nature of the piece relies so much on temperament to carry it into the ascendency that perfection is probably not such a good thing anyway.

Casting, of course, is crucial and I happen to know that this latest Barenboim offering went through some trials and tribulations in that regard. But the discs in front of me are the ones I am reviewing and they throw up much that is exciting and moving and, yes, even surprising. Barenboim certainly honours the piece - no question about that - and while there are choices I would have made differently, the grand rhetoric and quiet mysticism of the piece are generally not found wanting. It carries, as you might expect, huge authority. Even the strange sepulchral colours of the opening page bring a tangible murmur of reassurance from the luminous Staatskapelle Berlin strings and, as the Prelude rolls out with deep and abiding sureness, key themes previewed with an already powerful sense of déjà vu, Barenboim's instinctive feeling for Elgar's phraseology establishes a thoroughly 'authentic' manner.

Andrew Staples is a young-sounding and affecting Gerontius, occasionally perhaps a little overly reverent in his response to text (an English chorister's background), but he uses his vulnerability to good effect -'Mary, pray for me' - and though the heroics can be a bit of a stretch, that can also be exciting, conveying in itself the sense of a human soul in extremis. The climax of the beautifully sung 'Sanctus fortis' - 'In thine own agony' - is a case in point (though nothing can erase memories of Pears in this moment), and of course 'Take me away' is another. It's a more than creditable account of a role where the delicate balance between purity and heft is never easy to find in one voice.

Catherine Wyn-Rogers is, of course, a very experienced pair of hands, having grown to inhabit the role of the Angel over many years. She sings with great feeling and intensity and an always vivid response to text. Though some may find the beat in the voice obtrusive (I don't), the depth of her characterisation is a far cry from her somewhat cautious showing with Vernon Handley nearly a quarter of a century ago

(CfP/Warner, 10/93), and, through many a beauteously soft phrase and conversely some chilling chest tones as we draw nearer the Judgement Hall, she really brings the role off the page.

Thomas Hampson is hugely authoritative in his priestly exhortations to 'Go forth!' – listen to how he intensifies dramatic effect through the colour of the words – and the harmonic frisson between him and the soaring sopranos in the final reprise is glorious.

Barenboim's Berlin choirs are both sensitive and impressive, and refreshingly true in intonation - though a little hampered in the Demon's Chorus by Barenboim's heavy pacing, which initially lacks the snap and snarl to give the panting hordes their vindictiveness. I also wish the full-throated arrival of 'Praise to the holiest' were marked with a more emphatic and euphoric and, more importantly, longer landing on the first word. That said, the chorus gathers momentum, swinging to its climax with the wind under collective wings and the big pay-off - a huge ritardando and mighty sostenuto on the final chord – is pretty hair-raising.

So plenty to savour in this *Gerontius* – a fine companion to Barenboim's marvellous accounts of the two symphonies – and if not the *Gerontius* to have (Barbirolli must retain that honour), I know I shall be returning to it often and with great pleasure. **Edward Seckerson** 

Selected comparison:

Barbirolli (10/65<sup>R</sup>, 12/89<sup>R</sup>) (EMI/WARN) 573579-2

#### Handel

Neun deutsche Arien, HWV202-210<sup>a</sup>. Brockes Passion, HWV48 – excs Ina Siedlaczek *sop* 

**Lautten Compagney / Wolfgang Katschner** Audite (F) AUDITE97 729 (65' • DDD • T/t)

#### Handel

Neun deutsche Arien, HWV202-210<sup>a</sup>. Trio Sonatas - Op 2 No 1 HWV386*b*; Op 5 No 3 HWV398. Concerto a quattro (attrib Telemann) <sup>a</sup>Gillian Keith *sop* Florilegium / Ashley Solomon Channel Classics © CCS35117 (78' • DDD • T/t)





Handel composed very little music on texts in his native German tongue. The most notable examples are settings of poetry by Barthold Heinrich Brockes (1680-1747), a Hamburg town councillor who had known Handel since they were both students at



The Trondheim Symphony Choir and Orchestra record Ståle Kleiberg's Mass for Modern Man for the audiophile label 2L

the University of Halle in 1702. Nevertheless, it was after Handel had settled permanently in London that he set Brockes's Passion oratorio *Der für die Sünde der Welt gemarterte und sterbende Jesus* (c1716) and nine devout poems from the same author's *Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott, bestehend in Physicalisch- und Moralischen Gedichten* (second edition, 1724).

Wolfgang Katschner unusually programmes the so-called Nine German Arias alongside rearrangements of selections from the Brockes-Passion. The Lautten Compagney's specialism in plucked continuo instruments and penchant for copious artistic licence results in a colourful assortment of numerous continuo instruments (including two lutes and anachronistic harp). Ina Siedlaczek's slightly pinched, girlish timbre lacks compassionate warmth ('Süsse Stille' is tranquil enough but does not convey serene consolation), although she makes up for it with admirably restrained embellishments and affectionate communication of the poetry. I enjoyed her airy shaping of melodic contours in 'Meine Seele hört im Sehen' but was less enamoured by the whimsical alternation between oboe and violin for the solo obbligato part, and the tinkering capriciously with continuo

instrumentation during the B section; the solo obbligato part in 'Das zitternde Glänzen der spielenden Wellen' is recomposed for both oboe and flute, including passages featuring both together that contain plenty of notes that Handel certainly did not write. The most persuasive moment is when Siedlaczek and violinist Daniel Deuter are left to weave their sweetly persuasive spell without undue interventionism ('Die ihr aus dunklen Grüften'), but overall these superficially attractive performances lack aesthetic coherence.

Florilegium more sensibly intersperse the Nine German Arias between a couple of trio sonatas and an obscure D minor chamber 'concerto'; the latter survives in the library of Count Schönborn in Wiesentheid but its attribution to Handel is surely spurious. The continuo duo of cellist Jennifer Morsches and harpsichordist Terence Charlston (on a 1766 Kirchman instrument that belonged to Christopher Hogwood) play with beguiling refinement, and flautist Ashley Solomon and violinist Bojan Čičić play with judicious melodiousness and delicacy (especially in a breathtaking performance of the Largo in Op 2 No 1). Florilegium's expert chamber-playing also pervades the arias,

but the effectiveness of these is diminished by Gillian Keith's quick vibrato and self-conscious ornamentation. Solomon's flute-playing is quietly rapturous in its illustration of nature imagery in 'Meine Seele hört im Sehen' (Morsches's idea to use pizzicato for the bass line works beautifully in tandem with Charlston's lightly tripping harpsichord realisation), whereas Čičić's supple violin has rapier-like finesse in 'Das zitternde Glänzen'. Nevertheless, the incongruity of Florilegium's musical intelligence with Keith's quivery tension yields disappointing results. David Vickers

### **Kleiberg**

Mass for Modern Man

Mari Eriksmoen sop Johannes Weisser bar
Trondheim Vocal Ensemble and Symphony
Orchestra / Eivind Gullberg Jensen
2L (© ( + + ) 2L136SABD (68' • DDD/DSD •
DTS-HD MA5.1 & LPCM stereo 24/192kHz,
9.1 Auro-3D 96kHz & 11.1 Dolby Atmos 48kHz • T)



Ståle Kleiberg's Mass for the Modern Man deals with pertinent questions surrounding



# PYGMALION RAPHAËL PICHON

# STRAVAGANZA D'AMORE!

THE BIRTH OF OPERA AT THE MEDICI COURT

The sumptuous world of the 'Intermedi'

Late sixteenth-century Florence was a theatre: first and foremost a political one, in the eyes of the dynasties that wished to use the arts to display their power. A humanist one too, as is shown by these *intermedi* (interludes) that sought to achieve the perfect blend between music and poetry, the ideal of a certain Renaissance. Inserted into plays imitating the ancient writers, these entertainments were presented with lavish visual and musical resources. After reaching an initial peak in 1589 with the *intermedi* composed for Bargagli's *La Pellegrina*, this tradition was prolonged in the burgeoning genre of opera by such composers as Peri, Caccini and, very soon, Monteverdi and Gagliano. Rather than aiming for the impossible ideal of a reconstruction, Raphaël Pichon has devised a sort of imaginary intermedio by selecting the finest gems from this repertory, featuring the figures of Apollo, Orpheus and Eurydice, and above all Cupid: Love, Love, Lovel



**LIMITED EDITION 2 CDs + 1 BOOK** 

HMM 902286.87

the role of Christian faith in contemporary society and, by association, the relevance of the 'genre' that is the concert Mass. Much like Britten's War Requiem, Kleiberg's work juxtaposes the liturgical texts of the Mass Ordinary with contemporary poetry that spins off and sometimes rails against those texts. These 'stories' by Jessica Gordon stories of grief, displacement and loss of faith - may stand in contrast to the liturgy of the Mass but as a result, Kleiberg's setting of that liturgy becomes purposefully less sure of itself, 'not an unambiguous affirmation', in the composer's own words.

The piece is scored for two soloists, choir and small orchestra, and Eivind Gullberg Jensen certainly has some talent on board: the unfailingly bright-voiced Mari Eriksmoen, the expressive Johannes Weisser (though this scale of piece isn't ideal for him) and the professional, newly formed Trondheim Vocal Ensemble in addition to members of the Trondheim Symphony Orchestra. All are arranged in a circle around 2L's microphones, and the booklet offers typically in-depth information about the recording process.

And the music? Perhaps 2L's HD surround sound reveals elements that I have missed in conventional stereo. As it is, I find Kleiberg's endlessly repeating loops and simple, stepwise counterpoint constricting. The feeling of an improvised organ preamble pervades. The vocal writing – with many instances of one-syllable-per-uniform-length-note – can feel foursquare and divorced from verbal and poetic meaning. Kleiberg certainly captures the sense of ambiguity he refers to but it comes at the expense of pretty much anything else.

Andrew Mellor

### Kurtág

'Complete Works for Ensemble and Choir' Four Capriccios, Op 9. Four Songs to Poems by János Pilinszky, Op 11. Grabstein für Stephan, Op 15c. Messages of the Late Miss R Troussova, Op 17. ...quasi una fantasia..., Op 27 No 1. Double Concerto, Op 27 No 2. Samuel Beckett: What is the Word, Op 30b. Songs of Despair and Sorrow, Op 18. Four Poems by Anna Akhmatova, Op 41. Colindă-Baladă, Op 46. Brefs Messages, Op 47

Natalia Zagorinskaya sop Gerrie de Vries mez Yves Saelens ten Harry van der Kamp bass Jean-Guihen Queyras vc Tamara Stefanovich pf Elliott Simpson gtr Csaba Király pianino/spkr Netherlands Radio Choir; AskolSchönberg / Reinbert de Leeuw

ECM New Series (M) (3) 481 2883 (151' • DDD • T/t)



Across the 11 works on this three-disc set, which don't sit too happily under

the title 'Complete Works for Ensemble and Choir' whichever way you cut it, György Kurtág's unmatched and exacting qualities as a composer make themselves felt in typically intuitive ways. In almost all the pieces included, from the ostensibly well-mannered ...quasi una fantasia... to the kicking and raging Songs of Despair and Sorrow, we are reminded that while the music of Kurtág's colleagues became ever more transcendent and international, he himself dug deeper into his own country's soil and was never afraid to get mud on his shoes. A work such as Four Poems by Anna Akhmatova proves that sophistication is certainly not a casualty of that process.

Songs of Despair and Sorrow might bear allusions to Russian traditions in more than the language it sets but Kurtág's vocal friction, ordered polyphony and unsettled whispering can be heard in works vocal and non-vocal throughout this collection, and indeed throughout Kurtág's output. He sets Romanian in the biggest single movement recorded, Colindă-Baladă, based on a colindă collected by Bartók in 1913. Half collective ritual, half bustling narrative, this ultra-variegated, delicate and dense piece gets a slightly more shaky performance from the Netherlands Radio Choir than the Songs but perhaps the payoff of full-on engagement with the music's many tendrils necessitates it.

By contrast, the more spare Kurtág's textures, the more this recording excels – and drops the jaw. There is some sense of that in the 'forced inarticulation' of Samuel Beckett: What is the Word but perhaps it's heard best in the Four Capriccios, Messages of the Late Miss R Troussova, Brefs Messages and Grabstein für Stephan. Kurtág himself writes in the booklet that he asked musicians to re-record some tracks, singing to them down the telephone when he thought they could improve on their first efforts. (I once saw him interrupt a concert when he wasn't happy with a singer's interpretation of a tiny song.) It's easy to imagine this ultra-exacting composer having some thoughts on the latter piece, whose lonely beauty is only revealed when it finds its true equilibrium. The playing here is exquisite.

Likewise that Kurtág speciality: the fragment. Natalia Zagorinskaya sounds well aware in the *Messages of the Late Miss R Troussova* that these little revelations

hinge on what is not said as much as what is. The composer's freedom from the necessity to transition is as musically cleansing as it is communicatively direct, full of tantalising imagery. Right over at the back end of disc 3, these pieces have an instrumental partner in *Brefs Messages*. I misread the title as 'brief messages' at first but that is what you get and the music, in the hands of this composer who speaks most powerfully when he's at his shortest, quietest and simplest (and often paradoxically cryptic as a result), is richer than many a deep, sprawling essay for it. A proper treasure trove. Andrew Mellor

### **Perti**

'Grands motets for Ferdinando de' Medici'
Cantate laeta carmina. Date melos, date
honores. Gaudeamus omnes
Basel Madrigalists; Musica Fiorita /
Daniela Dolci org
Pan Classics ® PC10357 (66' • DDD • T)



Giacomo Antonio Perti (1661-1756) was *maestro di* cappella of Bologna's

prestigious San Petronio for nearly 60 years but moonlighted occasionally. In particular, he was commissioned by Prince Ferdinando de' Medici to compose numerous operas for the Florentine court's private theatre at Pratolino (all lost) and a series of largescale motets to be sung the day after the birthday of Grand Duke Cosimo III. Three of these composed between 1704 and 1706 are performed by the Basler Madrigalisten and Musica Fiorita, directed from the organ by Daniela Dolci. Rodolfo Zitellini's booklet note calls them 'the delicate union of operatic style and grandiose church music', and suggests that Perti was able to experiment more liberally than he could in Bologna.

Intriguingly, the inclusion of archaic cornetts in several of the grands motets was requested by Prince Ferdinando – and they combine with a pair of natural trumpets to strikingly regal effect in the opening of Cantate laeta carmina; the one-voice-per-part choir is initially over-powered but masterly arias are attractively varied: the partnership of the bass Raitis Grigalis and trumpeter Jean-François Madeuf has sparkling buoyancy ('Tubarum sonitus'), and upper strings provide weightless support for the soprano Cristina Grifone's intelligent declamation ('O columba speciosa'). Date melos, date bonores contains a lovely minorkey siciliano for soprano and strings ('Quam dulce repetit'), a graceful description of

flowers flourishing on the banks of the Arno ('Flores Arni', in which the countertenor Flavio Ferri-Benedetti spars elegantly with florid obbligato violin), and the agitated 'Fremunt tartara' generates dynamic excitement from Musica Fiorita's strings and Grifone's precise coloratura; the magnificent closing eight-part chorus has a central contrapuntal section that is the equal of the finest solemn church music by Lotti or Scarlatti. *Gaudeamus omnes* has a charming pastoral for soprano and strings ('Virgo dulcis', sung limpidly by Jessica Jans) and a grand fugal conclusion for double choir.

This long overdue advocacy of Perti's merits also reveals a tantalising glimpse into the under-explored musical culture of Florence during the last years of the Medici dynasty. David Vickers

### **Purcell**

'The English Orpheus'

Chacony, Z730. Jehova, quam multi sunt hostes mei, Z135. Magnificat and Nunc dimittis, Z231. O sing unto the Lord, Z44. Rejoice in the Lord alway (The Bell Anthem), Z49. Suite, Z661. Te Deum, Z232. Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts, Z58c. Voluntary, Z720 The Chapel Choir of Trinity Hall, Cambridge; Orpheus Britannicus / Andrew Arthur Priory © PRCD1182 (76' • DDD • T)



A considered exposé of Purcell's still woefully under-exposed genius is always welcome,

especially one as varied and intelligent as Andrew Arthur's, with his aptly named ensemble, Orpheus Britannicus, supporting his young mixed Choir of Trinity Hall, Cambridge. The lingua franca here for Arthur is the composer's church music – although Gallic influence is mere surface finery compared to Purcell's extraordinarily expressive and indigenous canvas – with a representative selection of anthems and canticles neatly offset against stylishly delivered instrumental contributions.

Making the most of Purcell's deeply elegant music requires a particular sensitivity to linear shape, lyrical articulation and clarity of texture, not least in order to draw upon the pungency of the harmonic language. Arthur finds a remarkably atmospheric palette throughout, evident from the sprightly opening strains of *O sing unto the Lord* to the colourful and noble projections of the *Te Deum*, a grandiloquent conceit which translated easily from the panegyrics of William and Mary to influence Handel's Georgian fare.

Alongside these pleasingly idiomatic features, the correlation between solo verses, string interludes and the full group in these pieces makes for a profoundly consequential experience, each section organically emerging from the last. Arthur never forces the pace or engages in quickwin mannerisms. The Bell Anthem is a case in point, where its lightly cascading opening (an almost Newtonian musical metaphor) sets the scene with an easy nonchalance, gradually injected with its delicious blend of inward reflection and balletic fervour. The solo singing is not always super-refined and 'placed' but rarely fails in its good judgement and affecting imagery.

Of the other pieces, relish Arthur's own playing of the mesmerising Voluntary and the bittersweet pearls of the great G minor *Chacony. Jehova, quam multi sunt*, that most exquisite creation by a teenager, is afforded just the right balance between abstract wonder and rhetorical purpose. With this kind of expert control and youthful responsiveness, the poignancy of the music should penetrate the hardest of hearts. The recorded sound is outstanding. Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

### **Sheppard**

Gaude, gaude, gaude Maria.

Media vita. Missa Cantate

The Choir of Westminster Cathedral /

Martin Baker

Hyperion © CDA68187 (80' • DDD • T/t)



Why has the music of John Sheppard remained comparatively

neglected, while works by near-contemporaries Taverner, Tallis, Tye and White have flourished? Could it really be down to simple musical bureaucracy, as Jeremy Summerly argues in his superb booklet notes for this new recording of Sheppard's magnum opus – the 30-minute *Media vita*?

In today's culture of anniversary-driven programming, is the absence of a definitive birthdate to mark and memorialise really enough to blight a composer's chances? Or is it an even more pragmatic question of the lack of editions of his work that existed until fairly recently? Or could it, perhaps, be that the same angular, nonconformist polyphony that kept the composer from an Oxford doctorate during his lifetime is still disquieting for listeners more comfortable with the consonance of Tallis?

If it's the latter, then this new release by Martin Baker and the Westminster Cathedral Choir should go some way towards correcting the problem. While the smaller forces of Contrapunctus bring a wonderfully airy purity and flexibility to their rendition (the best, for my money, of extant Media vita recordings that also include The Tallis Scholars and Stile Antico), they ultimately offer something intimate. Westminster, by contrast, match the monumentality of the work's own structure in a spacious, architectural performance whose physical heft is balanced by a blend so smudgy-soft that the impression is of hundreds of voices all sharing in this musical prayer. The lower key (a full fourth lower than The Tallis Scholars) and the more diffuse tone of boy trebles also help to cradle this emotive text in sooty vocal warmth - much more suited to this meditation on death than halogen brilliance.

Westminster pair *Media vita* with two other six-voice works by Sheppard: the Marian motet *Gaude*, *gaude*, *gaude Maria* and the *Missa Cantate*. In the generous acoustic of All Hallows, Gospel Oak, the contrapuntal intricacies of both emerge clearly, never lost in Sheppard's carefully spaced vocal textures. It's quite possible that 2017 marks Sheppard's 500th anniversary year. It's hard to think of a better birthday present than this outstanding recording of three of his finest works. Alexandra Coghlan

Media vita – selected comparison: Contrapunctus, Rees (5/15) (SIGN) SIGCD408

### Stradella

'The Stradella Project, Vol 4' Santa Pelagia

Roberta Mameli sop Raffaele Pe contr Luca Cervoni ten Sergio Foresti bar Ensemble Mare Nostrum / Andrea De Carlo Arcana (B) A431 (50' • DDD • T/t)



The sources of *Santa Pelagia* relate to performances in Modena in 1688 –

six years after Stradella was murdered in Genoa. It seems likely that the oratorio originated in Rome; the eminent scholar Carolyn Gianturco suggested that it might have been commissioned by Queen Christina of Sweden in 1673. Andrea De Carlo suspects that the parts for violins and viola in the Modena manuscript are not Stradella's own handiwork; he acknowledges there is already a recording of the oratorio that includes the disputed



Roberta Mameli sings Stradella with impeccable stylishness and eloquence

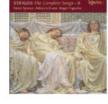
strings (Stradivarius, 2008), and argues that this allows him the liberty to pursue his own vision of how Stradella's voice parts can instead be accompanied by up to eight basso continuo instruments (viola da gamba, cello, violone, archlute, two theorbos, triple harp, harpsichord and organ); Ensemble Mare Nostrum's realisations range from sweet subtlety to vigorous spiciness in accordance to the emotion of the sung texts, and passages marked in the score as ritornellos are interpreted as improvisations over the bass line.

Pelagia (a wealthy and beautiful courtesan of Antioch) was inspired by the teaching of Bishop Nonno of Edessa to be baptised; she renounced her sinfulness and spent the rest of her days as a reclusive hermit at the Mount of Olives. Little of that is explained in the libretto's Counter-Reformation trope of vanitas vanitatum: the penitent Pelagia (sung with impeccable stylishness and eloquence by Roberta Mameli) is at the centre of an intellectual moral dispute between personifications of the temptations of the World (characterised with an arrogant swagger by Sergio Foresti) and the true doctrine of the warrior Religion (the dulcet Raffaele Pe), with an occasional chime in support of Religion from Bishop Nonno (the lighttoned Luca Cervoni). Regardless of how much or little of the composer's original conception is intact, the fourth instalment in De Carlo's ambitious Stradella Project is notable for its exceptional quality of musicianship, with all participants communicating the essence of the text with the utmost clarity and engagement. David Vickers

### **R Strauss**

'The Complete Songs, Vol 8'
Cäcilie, Op 27 No 2. Wenn..., Op 31 No 2. Bruder
Liederlich, Op 41 No 4. Drei Lieder, Op 43 - No 1,
An Sie; No 3, Die Ulme zu Hirsau. Fünf Lieder,
Op 46. Acht Lieder, Op 49 - No 5, Sie wissen's
nicht; No 6, Junggesellenschwur. Sechs Lieder,
Op 67 - No 4, Wer wird von der Welt verlangen;
No 5, Hab' ich euch denn je geraten; No 6,
Wanderers Gemütsruhe. Der Pokal, Op 69 No 2.
Vier letzte Lieder<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Rebecca Evans sop Nicky Spence ten Roger Vignoles pf Hyperion (F) CDA68185 (64' • DDD • T/t)



Roger Vignoles starts his characteristically engaging booklet note for this final volume in Hyperion's Strauss song survey with an explanation about what might seem an unexpected inclusion. But he makes no apology for his decision to crown the series with the *Four Last Songs* in their piano arrangement (that for 'Im Abendrot' slightly beefed up by Vignoles). It turns out to be a generous bonus of a very welcome sort.

These versions are obviously no replacement for the famously complex and dappled orchestral accompaniments of the originals, and Vignoles happily admits as much. But the gains in immediacy and intimacy of these reductions bring their own rewards, and Rebecca Evans, a couple of moments of discomfort notwithstanding, makes a supremely eloquent and musical case for them. It's perhaps not quite on the same level as Barbara Bonney's recording on Decca, where Malcolm Martineau seems to me to do an even more persuasive job with the piano reductions, but it's a deeply touching, moving performance.

Most of the rest of the music here is clearly not on the same exalted level – Strauss left a big barrel of songs, which such an undertaking as this cannot leave unscraped. We kick of with the marvellous 'Cäcilie', though, and the five Rückert Lieder of Op 46 are fine, serious works –

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'Morgenrot' is beguiling, and there's a seductive sense of expansive lyricism to 'Ich sehe wie in einem Spiegel'. 'Der Pokal', composed in 1918, strikes a passionately internationalist and conciliatory tone, and the 1899 Klopstock setting 'An Sie' comes across as a gentle gem, especially when flanked as here by much that tends towards being strenuous and overwrought.

Nicky Spence is superb. The voice has recently grown to encompass more heroic roles and we hear that in this selection, in the bright, lively tone and ringing top – not always sounding totally settled, but exciting nonetheless. He deals heroically with Strauss's more outrageous demands and, perhaps most importantly, he has just the right interpretative keenness and enthusiasm to put a persuasive case for everything he sings here.

I have a few quibbles with some of Vignoles's assertions in his note (the period between 1901 and 1919 doesn't cover 'virtually all of Strauss's operatic output', for example) but he offers tireless, engaged and eloquent support throughout. His high-quality playing has been a constant in a series that – much like Strauss's own song output – has had its ups and downs, but which also finishes on a high. Hugo Shirley Vier letzte Lieder – selected comparison:

Bonney, Martineau (5/99) (DECC) & 460 812-2DH

### **Viardot**

'Deutsche Lieder'

Agnes. Allein. Auf die Rose. Auf Grusiens Hügeln. Die Beschwörung. Das Blümlein. Er ist's. Der Gärtner. Der Gefangene. Im April. In der Frühe. Die Kapelle. Die Klagende. Märchen. Mein Fluss. Die Meise. Morgenlied. Des Nachts. Nixe Binsefuss. O sing, du Schöne, singe mir nicht. Rätsel. Die Soldatenbraut. Die Sterne. Verlangen. Das verlassene Mägdlein. Das Vöglein. Zwei Rosen

Miriam Alexandra sop Eric Schneider pf Oehms (F) OC1878 (71' • DDD • T/t)



This, first and foremost, is a labour both of love and of scholarship. Miriam

Alexandra combines a career as a soprano – Sophie and Gretel are among her roles – with that of an academic, specialising in the music of Pauline Viardot, on whom she completed a doctorate in 2014, and whose works she has edited for publication. For her debut CD she has chosen some 27 of Viardot's songs, mostly composed for private performance during her years in Baden-Baden (1863-70), where she was the centre of an extraordinary and

cosmopolitan artistic circle following her decision to abandon her stage career.

All the songs here were first published in German, though in addition to settings of poetry written in the language, Alexandra includes material based on translations of Pushkin, Fet and Turgenev (who may have been Viardot's lover). Viardot claimed she took Schubert as a model, though one also notices the influences of Schumann and, above all, of Liszt (her piano teacher) in melodic shaping and complexity of accompaniment. After Goethe, Mörike was her favourite German poet: 'Agnes' and 'Das verlassene Mägdelein' are particularly exquisite settings of his work. The Russian songs bring local colour, a darker emotional landscape and greater freedom of harmonic experimentation into play. 'Des Nachts', to a text by Pushkin, is rhapsodically introspective, and very beautiful.

Regrettably, however, not all Alexandra's material suits her. Her voice is crystalline, bell-like, with an appealing gleam at the top, albeit limited in its dynamic range. Her essentially non-interventionist approach lets clean, clear lines do the primary interpretative work, though her diction is admirably clear throughout. Songs such as 'Der Gärtner' and 'Die Soldatenbraut', two Mörike settings that sound like operetta arias, impress with their sparkle and wit. But some of the Pushkin settings, such as 'Der Gefangene' and 'Die Beschwörung', ideally need a darker tone and greater verbal weight. At such moments it is left to Eric Schneider to supply the requisite emotional density: his playing, fluid and beautifully controlled, is exemplary throughout. Tim Ashley

### Victoria

'Works for Six Voices'

Ardens est cor meum. Benedicta sit sancta Trinitas. Congratulamini mihi. Nigra sum sed formosa. O Domine Jesu Christe. Quem vidistis, pastores. Salve, regina. Tu es Petrus. Vadam et circuibo civitatem. Vexilla regis 'More Hispano'. Vidi speciosam

Nordic Voices

Chandos Chaconne (F) . CHSAO402 (56' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



This is perhaps Nordic Voices' most satisfying recording to date. Peter Quantrill's

review of their 'Lamentations' disc (which also included Victoria's music – Chandos, 12/09) praised their near-flawless technique while feeling that rival interpretations cut deeper expressively. In truth, their very

bright sound lends itself more readily to the selection of music on this new offering, which showcases Victoria at his most joyous. In that sense it is a counterweight to the previous recording, whose contents were uniformly and determinedly sombre.

Admirers of the effortlessly cool Nordic sound won't be disappointed and may even find themselves on familiar territory (perhaps recalling a fine account of Victoria's Tenebrae Responsories by Lumen Valo many years ago – Alba, 11/98 – nla). There's no denying the beguiling sonority but just occasionally a more determined inflection of the basic delivery wouldn't go amiss. A case in point is O Domine Fesu Christe, whose devotional text emphasises the penitent's humble contemplation of Christ's Passion. Victoria's setting is rapt and intense but Nordic Voices might have made more of its penitential overtones. As it is, I was left marvelling at the extent of Victoria's borrowings from Palestrina, which may just cross the line between direct modelling and blatant appropriation (in modern terms, plagiarism). Compare the two composers' settings of Tu es Petrus and you'll see what I mean. One can only assume that overt flattery was intended, but other nods in the elder figure's direction can be heard throughout. Such observations came to me unbidden, in fairness, because the performances are as legible as one could wish. Fabrice Fitch

### **Julie Davies**

Bellini Sei Ariette - No 2, Vanne, o rosa fortunata; No 5, Per pietà, bell'idol mio; No 6, Ma rendi pur contento. La farfalletta Liszt Three Petrarch Sonnets, S270a Schubert Four Canzonas, D688.

Vedi quanto adoro ancora ingrato!, D510 Wagner Les adieux de Marie Stuart Julie Davies sop Charles Spencer pf
Capriccio (F) C3003 (54' • DDD)



This is an unhackneyed programme of songs from a young

American soprano, the latest in a series called 'Première Portraits'. The *Petrarch Sonnets*, composed in the late 1830s, are the ones that Liszt turned into the identically named set for piano, S158. 'La farfalletta', a three-stanza strophic *canzoncina*, was composed when Bellini was 12. The three Ariettas, from a set of six, are to words by the great 18th-century librettist Pietro Metastasio. 'Per pietà, bell'idol mio', with its move from minor to major, is slightly less anodyne than the other two.



Effortlessly cool: Nordic Voices sing Victoria - perhaps their most satisfying recording to date

Schubert wrote 'Vedi quanto adoro' as an exercise when he was studying with Salieri. In a scene from Metastasio's Didone abbandonata, Dido begs Aeneas not to leave her; the setting is suitably agitated. Metastasio crops up yet again in the last two of the Vier Canzonen, which date from January 1820. Here the sources are, respectively, L'eroe cinese and Alessandro nell'Indie. The words of the first two are by one Jacopo Vittorelli; all four are simple, tuneful, quite unmemorable. Wagner wrote 'Les adieux de Marie Stuart' in March 1840, when he was living in Paris. Here Mary Queen of Scots bids a sad farewell to France, the 'cradle of my happy childhood'. The music progresses from a lyrical opening to extravagant roulades, one of them on the word 'que'.

Julie Davies sings artlessly or passionately, as appropriate, with a fearless top D flat in the first *Petrarch Sonnet*; Charles Spencer has one or two chances to shine in the occasional interlude or postlude. Unfortunately, they have not been well served by Capriccio. This is unfamiliar repertoire but there is no information on the music, and no texts or translations.

Richard Lawrence

### **Kathleen Ferrier**

'Kathleen Ferrier Remembered' Brahms Fünf Lieder, Op 47 - No 1, Botschaft (two versions); No 3, Sonntag. Vier Lieder, Op 96 -No 2, Wir wandelten; No 3, Es schauen die Blumen. Ruhe, Süssliebchen, im Schatten, Op 33 No 9. Auf dem See, Op 59 No 2. Der Jäger, Op 95 No 4. Nachtigall, Op 97 No 1 Jacobson Song of Songs Mahler Urlicht Parry Love is a bable, Op 152 No 3 Rubbra Three Psalms, Op 61 Schubert Die junge Nonne, D828. Lachen und Weinen, D777, Der Musensohn, D764, Rastlose Liebe, D138. Rosamunde, D797 - Der Vollmond strahlt. Suleika I, D720. Suleika II, D717. Wandrers Nachtlied II, D768. Winterreise, D911 - No 6, Wasserflut Stanford La belle dame sans merci Wolf Mörike-Lieder - No 15, Auf einer Wanderung

Kathleen Ferrier contr Somm (F) SOMMCD264 (80' • ADD • T/t) Recorded 1947-52



The fact that 19 of the 26 tracks on this release are here made public for the first time will

likely make this an essential purchase for anyone interested in the all-too-brief career of Kathleen Ferrier. All of the recordings were originally BBC broadcasts, as Paul Campion explains in his enthusiastic booklet note; just over half have been retrieved from the BBC's own archives and the rest, via the National Sound Archive at the British Library, from the private collection of Kenneth Leech, recorded off the airwaves.

Transfer engineer Ted Kendall has done what he can with the material but inevitably the sound quality is variable, with a fair amount of surface noise and thinning in the sound of Ferrier's remarkable contralto. Words struggle occasionally to get through, while the pianists (all but a handful of the tracks are accompanied by Frederick Stone, even though he's listed last on the cover) are often very much relegated to the background.

There are some wonderful performances, with the Rubbra, Jacobson and Parry settings that conclude the disc coming across especially vividly. Ferrier brings impressive vocal and interpretative authority and earnestness to the first two of Rubbra's *Three Psalms* – performances perhaps more powerful, even, than those on her later recording issued by Decca – though the jubilation of the third still strikes me awkward. Parry's 'Love is a bable', with Gerald Moore offering sparkling accompaniment, is a delight.

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The rest of the disc comprises more rarities (such as Stanford's Schubertian 'La belle dame sans merci') as well as more familiar repertoire, some of which Ferrier nevertheless didn't record elsewhere (Schubert's 'Suleika II', with Walter, for example). The honesty and integrity of Ferrier's artistry and the quiet intensity of her interpretations shine through in every track, while the quality of the voice – proper contralto richness, youthful and never hardening into matronly hauteur – can still be heard despite the technical deficiencies in the recordings.

Space precludes more detailed description of the riches here (including a tantalising, moving snippet of 'Urlicht', possibly recorded by Stone simply to fill a bit of left-over space on one of his metal discs, or a compelling *Winterreise* 'Wasserflut'). Suffice to say, though, this is an extremely important release. Hugo Shirley

### 'The Carlo G Manuscript'

Anonymous Amor Jesu dulcissime. Canzone. Ricercar. Toccatas - in A; in D; Elevatione. Veni dilecte 'Carlo G' Ago dormio et cor meum vigilat. Ego flos campi. Iste est. Mater Hierusalem. Miserere. Nigra sum. Panis angelicus. Peccavi super numerum. Sicut sponsus matris. Sub umbra illius. Tota pulchra es Caccini Benché sovra le stelle. Deus Dominus meus Giacobbi Luce gratiae tuae Quagliati

Profeti della Quinta / Elam Rotem org Glossa ® GCD922516 (66' • DDD • T/t)



One of the great things about early music is that there are still discoveries

out there to be made. And even if not as earth-shattering as a lost Monteverdi opera or 100 or so Bach cantatas, they can prove fascinating nevertheless. Such is the case with the so-called 'Carlo G Manuscript', a collection of early Italian Baroque sacred vocal solos and duets with organ which surfaced in a Venetian flea market about 15 years ago and subsequently disappeared via Sotheby's into a private collection, though thankfully not before it had been studied, scanned and made available on the internet.

What makes it special is not only that all but one of the dozens of pieces it contains (including some by Caccini) were previously unknown, but that both the vocal ornamentations and the continuo-like organ accompaniments are fully written out, revealing in the process much about the performance styles of the day. Then

there is the mystery of the composer of the great majority of these pieces, which in the manuscript are ascribed simply to 'Carlo G'; only on the title-page is his full name given, except (d'oh!) that a stain has obscured all the letters after G. (From the music, by the way, it is pretty clear that this is not Gesualdo).

This music is unassuming at heart, but with its simple but mellifluously embellished harmonies it would certainly have made a satisfying addition to whatever church services it was intended for. The performances on this selection give it every chance too. Soprano Perrine Devillers and countertenor Doron Schleifer cope with the intricate vocal roulades with skill and style, as does violinist Plamena Nikitassova when she takes over a vocal line (another practice suggested in the manuscript).

No less a star, though, is the organ, the stunning restored 17th-century instrument by Ategnati in the Chiesa dei Santi Eusebio e Vittore in Peglio, Italy, which is soft, fruity and wonderfully clear, whether played by Profeti della Quinta's director Elam Rotem in the vocal works or by Jörg-Andreas Bötticher in the solos (not from the manuscript) that have been added to show it off further. In places intimate, in others ravishing, these pieces are a delightful find, and are beautifully performed, recorded and presented.

Lindsay Kemp

### 'First Drop'



Ars Nova Copenhagen / Paul Hillier Canteloupe (F) CA21127 (71' • DDD • T/t)



'First Drop' aims to capture that special alchemy that takes place between

0

ensemble and composer when a new work is commissioned and performed. Of course, not every synthesis guarantees success, but it's difficult to resist the notion that everything Denmark's leading vocal ensemble touch turns into sonorous gold. Recorded by Ars Nova Copenhagen over a period of 10 years under their inspirational director, Paul Hillier, 'First Drop' exudes all the freshness and vitality of a spring shower on a sunny day.

While much of what is heard falls under the rather amorphous description 'post-

minimal', the range of styles is remarkably varied, from the giddy tonal glissandos heard in Michael Gordon's He saw a skull to Pablo Ortiz's twitchy neo-medieval Five Motets. In between there are contributions from first-generation minimalists, including a touchingly lyrical song by Louis Andriessen. Terry Riley's exuberant, multilayered musical evocation of Jack Kerouac's stream-of-consciousness poem 'Mexico City Blues' brilliantly rounds off the disc, while Reich's well-known Clapping Music is also given an energetic melodic and harmonic twist in Hillier's clever vocal arrangement.

But the main spotlight falls on two English composers. A poignant anti-war poem by Robert Palmer is woven into the famous medieval song 'L'homme armé' by Gabriel Jackson, while Howard Skempton's delicately crafted setting of a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson affirms Arnold Whittall's recent assertion in these pages that his music possesses the unerring knack of capturing one's attention 'with a few, often quiet sounds that manage to shrug off much of their long history while questioning their new contexts' (Contemporary Composers, 7/17).

Each performance benefits from the resonant acoustics of Garrison Church, Copenhagen, although a few editorial pops and clicks detract a little from a recording that ripples with vibrant colour and conviction. Pwyll ap Siôn

#### 'The Gate of Heaven'

**Finzi** God is gone up. Lo, the full, final sacrifice **Hadley** My beloved spake **Harris** Bring us, O Lord God. Faire is the heaven **M Martin** I saw the Lord. Ut unum sint **Samuel** Love bade me welcome **Stanford** For Io, I raise up. Te Deum in C minor

Choir of New College, Oxford/ Robert Quinney with Timothy Wakerell  ${\it org}$ 

Novum (F) NCR1391 (66' • DDD • T)



On the one hand, serious admiration for what Robert Quinney is already doing to this

illustrious choir within its own longstanding stylistic parameters. On the other, frustration that what was once the most relevant recording ensemble of its kind is churning out a 'Favourite Anthems' disc that we can add to a teetering pile. You can probably guess the repertoire without looking, though we do at least get a narrow streak of good-quality new music here.

New College Choir's distinctive sound – the polar opposite to the rooted glow

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 $The \ Fraternity's \ plain chant-singing \ has \ the \ sense \ of \ a \ ritual \ overheard \ rather \ than \ a \ performance \ recorded$ 

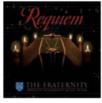
of an ensemble like that of St John's, Cambridge - is recognisable here, but Quinney is taming the wildness that Edward Higginbottom instilled in the trebles and which could become unruly. The choir still sing with expression but have a keener sense of blend, if not quite the clipped frisson of their neighbours at Christ Church. The side effect – perhaps a result of the work being done on that blend - is that the performances can sound a little grounded. Harris's Bring us, O Lord God lacks rapture. The organ doesn't snarl at the start of Stanford's For lo, I raise up, which sets up a neat performance of a work whose initial priorities aren't neatness. The unfamiliarity of Matthew Martin's striking motets induces more characterful singing.

The meditative pace and darkening light of an evensong may explain this respectful approach. But we can hear that, with added authenticity, on the choir's regular webcasts. For a taste of New College Choir as a serious recording force exploiting their own idiosyncrasies, you need only sniff out recordings of Blow (Novum, 9/16), Ludford (K617, 8/08), Bach (Naxos, 6/03) and Pergolesi (Erato, 12/02). Here's hoping their next record continues that distinguished line, not this weather-beaten one. Andrew Mellor

### 'Requiem'

The Requiem Mass sung in plainchant The Fraternity

Sony Classical © 88985 41735-2 (77' • DDD • T/t)



Decca has the Cistercian monks of Heiligenkreuz and the nuns of Notre-

Dame-de-L'Annonciation, ClassicFM has the Ampleforth monks, Deutsche Grammophon the Benedictine monks of Beuron Archabbey, and now Sony has added the members of the Priestly Fraternity of St Peter to its roster. Gregorian chant - once a niche of a classical niche – has become big business in the record industry, but only when performed by religious orders themselves rather than by professional ensembles. Which raises the question of why people buy these discs: is it for the music or is it rather for some ineffable spirituality, some religious essence they possess, or the ritual they enact?

There's little in the packaging and presentation of 'Requiem', the debut recording from the Priestly Fraternity of St Peter, that suggests that music plays any but a supporting role in this release.

Booklet notes are sparse, highlighting the chant's role within the broader context of the Requiem service, and an introductory note from Father Gerard Saguto invites the listener to 'experience a form of the Requiem as it has been prayed throughout the world for centuries'.

Nevertheless, there's plenty here to please on a purely musical level. While the best-selling monks of Heiligenkreuz have a distinctively grainy texture to their singing, a slightly pursed and nasal quality, the singing here is far freer and more youthful. Lengthy chants, such as the 'Ego sum' antiphon and the offertory 'Domine, Jesu Christe', move forward with pulse and fluidity, and if the movement isn't always unanimous, this only adds to the disc's sense of a ritual overheard rather than a performance recorded.

The Requiem Mass provides a wonderful variety of chants, from the sweetly affirmative 'Lux aeterna' to the dark agitation of Celano's 'Dies irae', and yet it's still a relief when, finally, in the 'Pie Jesu' we get some polyphony (Palestrina's setting of the text) to soften the severity of so much monophony. It's not a performance that will win any awards; but, like the rest of the Mass recorded here, its directness and sincerity sets it apart from professional alternatives. Alexandra Coghlan

# REISSUES

**Peter Quantrill** relishes a 42-CD Decca set from St John's, Cambridge, and **James Jolly** remembers Richard Hickox

# Guest conducted

Another major Cambridge choir receives the 'complete' treatment

hlegm is a prerequisite for an Oxbridge choirmaster, and George Guest had it in abundance. His sangfroid account of RAF service in support of the D-Day landings occupies barely a page of his memoirs. On board a ship in the Channel one night, a nearby sailor observed the approach of an airborne torpedo, 'and in colourful but highly effective language advised me to duck immediately. The torpedo struck almost simultaneously and entered the craft through the paint store, the contents of which were catapulted through the air and landed on those on deck. I must have presented a strange sight to my parents when I arrived back in Chester on Survivors' Leave.'

Colourful and highly effective: these are signal qualities of so many recordings in this set, which documents Guest's 40-year tenure as Organist and Choirmaster of St John's College, Cambridge. Four years after Argo began recording at King's College, on Christmas Eve 1954, the company turned its attention to the establishment at the other end of Trinity Street. On 'Hear my Prayer', the 1958 album of popular anthems that opens the set, may already be discerned an inculcation of the values which Guest had learned to prize in his own Welsh choral education, as a boy in the choir of Bangor Cathedral, as a teenage choirmaster in Flintshire and then across the border in Chester Cathedral once his war service was complete.

Intonation is among the principal of those values, but not an end in itself. A larger concern for Guest was tone-colour, and how it should fit the music on the desk. The 1969 album of 'Italian and English Choral Music' is a demonstration of the adaptability of the St John's trebles, making a much narrower and brighter sound for Gabrieli and Gesualdo than in the evening canticle

settings which Herbert Howells had written 12 years previously for Guest and his choir.

Any cathedral or college choir is judged best on its daily work, the round of Evensongs and feasts through the calendar of the liturgical year. Of this work there are but a few examples, all treasurable in their way. A disc of psalms brings pleasure but leaves regret that Argo could not or would not invest in a recording of the complete Psalter (a project eventually completed by Priory and with the burden spread across several choirs). 'Like as the hart desireth the waterbrooks, so longeth my soul after thee': a perfectly judged example of the rhythmic accent emphasised by Guest, as distinct from a disruption of line with

### 'The comparison with King's may be inevitable but it need not be invidious'

dynamic accentuation, or melodramatic organ accompaniment. In this regard, the late John Scott is a model of discretion, decorating the lonely wandering of the pilgrim in the night-season of the same psalm with a nightingale-like treble.

Sad as it is that St John's recorded a solitary disc of Evensong, at least one of the psalms chosen was 108, and you can almost hear the relish of Guest over every word of verse 9: 'Moab is my washpot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe; over Philistia will I triumph.' The choice of music – Ayleward Responses, Sumsion in G, 'O clap your hands' by Vaughan Williams – is notable for its modesty: repertoire within the reach of every half-decent church choir, yet benefiting immeasurably from an aesthetic of perfectibility.

Christmas is covered by a conservative disc of carols and a judiciously plotted 'Meditation on Christ's Nativity'. Modern carols by the likes of Joubert, Warlock and



Malcolm Williamson alternate with readings by the Welsh actor William Squire, including TS Eliot's 'Journey of the Magi' timed to savour every local detail, high and low, not a bit less evocative than the poet's own recording.

In diction and articulation, too, St John's outstripped its contemporary rivals. The comparison with King's may be inevitable but it need not be invidious. 'The difference between our leading choirs is accounted for by the relative importance each attaches to technique and to emotion.' This is the closest that Guest comes to comparing his own achievements with those of Sir David Willcocks (whose Argo recordings with King's were reissued in 2015, reviewed 12/15).

Recording St John's and King's in parallel for decades, Argo mostly avoided the kind of duplication which would do neither establishment a service. If the greater worldwide fame of King's compelled Guest's recording projects to venture farther from the familiar, it was a happy consequence. Many of the set's most inspired performances lie outside the comfort zone of 20th-century English choirs: the Messe solennelle of Langlais and Litanies de la Vierge Noire of Poulenc (both thrillingly accompanied by the organ student of the day, Stephen Cleobury); the Missa festiva by Flor Peeters (with Scott again), and later excursions into the Italian Baroque, not only the Vivaldi Glorias but a grandly scaled St Cecilia Mass by Alessandro Scarlatti and a Stabat mater by Bononcini.

Older listeners will first have encountered the choir on record from its series of Haydn Masses, continued once King's had taken the plum of the *Nelson*. Not all the soloists adjust to the idiom of the singers behind them (there is some 'operatic' wobbling in the *Theresienmesse*, first to be recorded in the series), but the team of April Cantelo, Helen Watts,

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is particularly well matched in the Paukenmesse, and the sense of the music being discovered by the musicians as much as by their listeners does not preclude a response of real pathos to Haydn at his most reflective in a movement such as the Benedictus of the Creation Mass. The choir's later forays into Classical Masses before and after Haydn - by Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert have largely been forgotten, but the last two Schubert Masses in particular show how close Guest could come in coaxing the kind of punchy, even guttural sound from his trebles that is so characteristic of Austro-German male choirs.

Notions of accepted style in Purcell may have changed radically in the decades since making three rather stiff, uncharacteristically fallible albums of anthems but Guest himself was evidently not impervious to the way the Western Wind was blowing: the final disc of the set is an ASV recording, made in 1981 by Argo's founder-producer, Harley Usill. The tactus of the Sheppard Mass flows at a livelier pace, the parts are more distinctly separated and the vibrato considerably narrower than on 1960s and '70s albums of

of all the 42 discs, most show their age.

Cleobury and Scott, of the organ students at St John's, went on to make the most illustrious careers, but three discs of English church music from earlier in Guest's career showcase the prodigious talent (cut short too soon) of Brian Runnett (1935-70), Walmisley in D minor, Ireland's 'Greater Love' and even Stainer's Crucifixion: all gain drama and lustre from Runnett's incisive sense of rhythm and occasionally left-field registration choices.

The presentation and production of the box are worthy of Guest's devoted service to and curation of his choir. Arranged in chronological order, the albums are enclosed in beautifully reproduced original sleeves. The booklet opens with a useful index of all the repertoire therein, and closes with reflections by today's Director of Music, Andrew Nethsingha, and an essay by Geraint Lewis on 'The Sound of St John's'.

The paradox is that such a sound is more difficult to pin down than the much vaunted 'King's Sound'. Partly that's a matter of acoustics - the lower (everything is relative) chapel of St John's with its shorter decay will not mask imprecision or

smudges as generously as King's or the larger cathedrals – but also of approach. Guest's singers, whatever their age, adjusted to the music rather than the other way around. The set is all the more uneven but exciting for the strong but fleeting personalities that pass through the choir. In 1973 he had a tenor section with iron lungs to record Liszt's Missa choralis and five motets of Bruckner, as well as a particularly durable line-up of trebles. Most of their voices were evidently still intact a year later to record a Duruflé Requiem of terrific, sustained power; including Robert King, treble soloist in the Pie Fesu. Lewis quotes King, reflecting on Guest's legacy: 'He has always readily passed on his wisdom to the next generation, believing that music is a continually evolving tradition.' Peter Quantrill

### THE RECORDING

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# Richard Hickox remembered

■ ach August, Chandos reissues a number of **▲** CDs by a conductor who played an important role in the company's history and whose death in November 2008 robbed the music world of an inspirational artist, and someone whose service to British music was immense: Richard Hickox. This year sees a further four Hickox recordings return on Chandos's budget-price Collect label, and they're all worth exploring.

The most mainstream, in terms of repertoire, is **Brahms's** *Ein deutsches Requiem*, a recording first released in 1991. With two fine soloists, Dame Felicity Lott and David Wilson-Johnson, the London Symphony Chorus and London Symphony Orchestra, this is a de luxe line-up and Hickox was, of

course, completely at home in the choral repertoire. I enjoyed the performance immensely. No one puts a foot wrong and the whole thing just sounds so right, and that also means *sounds* so right, because Chandos achieved a lovely mellow glow to the sound too. And so it was with relief that I turned to John Steane's January 1992 review and found that he talked of Hickox giving a 'remarkably satisfying performance'. There's nothing radical here but it's a traditional account in absolutely the best sense of the word.

The same chorus and orchestra appear on a 1996 recording of Elgar's The Black Knight (a cantata, with quite a substantial part for the orchestra, from the early 1890s) based on a tale by Longfellow. Michael Kennedy's note suggests that The Black Knight is to Elgar's later output as Das klagende Lied is to Mahler's - so much of what lay ahead is already there, just waiting for the impetus to burst forth. Again, Hickox does it proud, with some terrific choral singing and fine orchestral playing (from what was, after all, once Elgar's own orchestra). The coupling is *Scenes from the Bavarian* Highlands, six songs to words by Elgar's wife Alice and written in the aftermath of a major immersion, at Bayreuth, in Wagner's music, not that Elgar's music is particularly Wagnerian here. Charming and rather intimate, they make for delightful listening.



Richard Hickox: an inspirational musician whose service to British music was immense

Walton wrote two operas, neither of which has really taken a hold on the repertoire, and certainly not in comparison with his contemporary Benjamin Britten. Troilus and Cressida was premiered in 1954 and The Bear in 1967 (in the heart of Britten country, at the 20th Aldeburgh Festival, and at the suggestion of Peter Pears – who never got a role in the finished work!). Based on a play by Chekhov, The Bear is scored for just three singers: the widow Popova (sung here by Della Jones), Smirnov (Alan Opie) and the servant Luka (John Shirley-Quirk). Popova has remained faithful to her late husband, much to the cynicical amusement of Luka. When one of her husband's creditors, Smirnov, shows up, a mighty argument ensues - Popova's late husband had clearly not been quite the saint that Popova thinks - resulting in Popova and Smirnov reaching for their pistols and taking aim at the other. But, of course, neither can fire because they've fallen in love. It's all performed with terrific verve and rich characterisation, the three singers on top form and Hickox coaxing his Northern Sinfonia to play brilliantly. If you don't know the work, it's well worth exploring.

With the City of London Sinfonia, an ensemble he founded in 1971, Hickox always gave of his best, and an all-**Holst** collection is a delight. Gathering together

six shorter works, it makes for a varied programme. A Fugal Overture, with its starring roles for flute and oboe, is terrific, as too, is the Double (Violin) Concerto, and both the Brook Green Suite and St Paul's Suite, with their affectionate portrayals of a city Holst loved, are done with great love. One of the highlights for me is the Lyric Movement for viola and small orchestra, written for Lional Tertis and played beautifully by Stephen Tees, and the Two Songs without Words would be a gift to broadcasters looking for miniatures. Nicely recorded, and informatively annotated by Lewis Foreman.

James Jolly

#### THE RECORDINGS

Brahms Ein deutsches Requiem
Lott; Wilson-Johnson; London
Sym Chorus; LSO / Hickox
Chandos Collect ® CHAN10945

**Elgar** The Black Knight. Scenes from the Bavarian Highlands

**London Sym Chorus; LSO / Hickox** Chandos Collect (B) CHAN10946

Walton The Bear

Jones; Opie; Shirley-Quirk; Northern Sinf / Hickox

Chandos Collect ® CHAN10947

**Holst** Orchestral works

City of London Sinf / Hickox Chandos Collect ® CHAN10948

# Opera



### Neil Fisher on Ádám Fischer's Mozart Zauberflöte from La Scala:

'Fatma Said is a BBC New Generation Artist and hers is the most complete display of Mozartian grace' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 88



### Mark Pullinger discovers Saint-Saëns's rarely heard Proserpine:

'Véronique Gens's ever-expressive colouring of text is superb, from haughty courtesan to desperate lover' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 90

### 



A generous cocktail of melodies and a conjuror's hat of pointedly apt dramaturgical settings make up Berlioz's late

(1862) setting of *Much Ado About Nothing*. On its own this score would be enough to make one weep for the ill fortune that kept him away so much from composing. His own twin descriptions of the work – 'a relaxation after *Les Troyens*' and 'a caprice written with the point of a needle' – are indicative of possible interpretative routes.

For Glyndebourne in summer 2016 director/costume designer Laurent Pelly, following up a sequence of generally admired French work for the house, takes very much the first route. This new Berlioz show is the dramatic equivalent of 'easy listening', each act a bonne bouche to fit either side of the festival's iconic long interval. The costumes are grey-and-white 1940s, the set large grey boxes (into which our marriage-resistant heroes B and B don't fit until the end; get it?), aside from the wedding reception - whose visual doodle is an orgy of precisely choreographed setting and removing of chairs and table. Little enough physically and nothing psychologically actually

happens on stage apart from negotiating the boxes/furniture to find picturesque positions from which to sing. It will please especially those who believe that such *Konzept-frei* stagings enable better concentration on the music.

Let's not be mealy-mouthed, though: such sweetness and neatness, a classical ballet of movement and placing, requires the hardest work and drill from cast and production team. And that is fully achieved here. The disappointment however is that, although Berlioz himself removed the more threatening or more grotesque strands from his version of the play (no Don John, no plot to frame Héro, no Dogberry and Verges), there are significant corners which would benefit from a less light production approach. These include Bénédict's objections to matrimony (well compared in David Cairns's booklet note to Berlioz's relations with second wife Marie Recio) and Héro's last-minute fears about her marriage to Claudio (a role much reduced by Berlioz). Such darker colours are well noticed by Colin Davis in his (no fewer than) three official recordings of the opera, especially in the LSO Live version (12/00).

They do not figure prominently in Antonello Manacorda's well-rehearsed reading here, nor does the advanced tonal fluidity already remarked by conductors such as Pierre Boulez (New York PO -Sony Classical, 9/73) in his committed version of the Overture. But Manacorda is a natural-sounding guide to the stage events shown here. His cast sound and work together naturally. Stéphanie D'Oustrac (an expressive face to enjoy in close-up) and Paul Appleby (carefully less histrionic in duet) spar well. The Ursule of Katarina Bradić is quite a find, more comfortable with notes and character than Sophie Karthäuser's Héro, accurate but less ethereal than ideal. The men do well, although Lionel Lhote's effortful Somarone the music-master, falling everywhere on a sliding table in Act 2, will not be to everyone's comic taste - but that may be Berlioz's fault in falling (for once) for the cliché that audiences have always

seemed to find onstage musical jokes especially hysterical.

The only official DVD to date of such an important opera, well recorded and filmed in a slick modern production, deserves a place in the catalogue and on your shelves, reservations notwithstanding. Mike Ashman

### Gluck

'Heroes in Love'

Demetrio - Dal suo gentil sembiante. Demofoonte - Sperai vicino il lido. Ezio - Se fedele mi brama il regnante; Se il fulmine sospendi. Ipermestra - Sinfonia. Ippolito - Se tu vedessi come vegg'io. Semiramide riconosciuta - Sinfonia; Tradita, sprezzata. Sofonisba - M'opprime, m'affanna; Nobil onda; Se in campo armato. Telemaco - Ah! non turbi il mio riposo

Sonia Prina *contr* laBarocca / Ruben Jais Glossa (F) GCD924101 (71' • DDD • T/t)



All-Gluck aria discs are still not all that common. This century has seen fine

examples from Daniel Behle (Decca, 9/14) and (especially) Cecilia Bartoli (Decca, A/01), but probably the next significant one before that is Janet Baker's (Philips/ Eloquence, 10/76). Not surprisingly, then, there are six premiere recordings among the 10 arias offered by Sonia Prina. Furthermore, she draws on none of the familiar French tragédies, nor even on the Italian Orfeo ed Euridice, but instead mainly on operas composed for Italy in the 1740s, plus a handful of later ones for Prague and Vienna. Nearly all therefore date from before Gluck determined on stripped-back expression in Orfeo and Alceste, and it is fair to say that there is no lack of showcase virtuosity - Gluck was after all writing for some of the great singing stars of the day.

Yet one can see here that he was always one to test a singer's acting skills. Take the note-torrents connecting the mountaintops and valley floors of the angry 'Se fedele mi brama il regnante' or the poignant unrequited love-minuet of 'Se tu vedessi

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Glyndebourne's production of Berlioz's Béatrice et Bénédict features a distinctive set of large grey boxes

come vegg'io'. Or explore the expressive depths of 'Ah! non turbi il mio riposo' with its commiserating solo oboe, and startle at the lightning-quick shot of fear that is 'M'opprime, m'affanna'. Even more extraordinary is 'Tradita, sprezzata', a real find which juggles with visceral force the strongly demarcated musics of pain and rage.

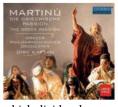
This is perfect stuff for Sonia Prina, whose firm, dark voice, wide tessitura and Olympically agile technique allow her to combine dazzling vocal virtuosity with compelling dramatic expression. She can sound less comfortable, it is true, in the kinder *galant* lines of 'Dal suo gentil sembiante' or 'Nobil onda', but on balance I feel that she reveals more of Gluck's genius than a smoother, perhaps more complacent singer might. Support from laBarocca under Ruben Jais is keen, if in places a little lacking in polish. Lindsay Kemp

### Martinů

| The Greek Passion (sung in English) |          |
|-------------------------------------|----------|
| Rolf Romei ten                      | Manolios |
| Dshamilja Kaiser mez                | Katerina |
| Wilfried Zelinka bass               | Grigoris |
| Markus Butter bar                   | Fotis    |
| Manuel von Senden ten               | Yannakos |
| Tatjana Miyus sop                   | Lenio    |
| Taylan Reinhard ten                 | Panait   |

Graz University Chorus; Chorus and Extra Chorus of Graz Opera; Graz Philharmonic Orchestra / Dirk Kaftan

Oehms © ② OC967 (137' • DDD) Recorded live, March-April 2016 Includes synopsis, text and translation



Martinu's *The Greek Passion*, with its tale of refugees and the lack of tolerance

which divides the community where they attempt to settle, is full of striking contemporary resonances. The opera was inspired by Nikos Kazantzakis's novel Christ Recrucified, in which refugees from a Turkish massacre seek shelter in a Greek village as the locals are preparing their annual Easter Passion play. Many of the villagers live out their Passion roles in real life, resulting in the Christ-figure of Manolios, the local shepherd, being stoned to death by his fellow villagers for standing by the refugees. Martinů, who spent much of his life in exile, wrote some of his most

beautiful, profound music for what is probably his finest stage work.

There are essentially two versions of The Greek Passion. It was originally recommended to the Board of the Royal Opera House in 1957 by Rafael Kubelík but the management turned it down. Martinů, wounded by this rejection, reworked it drastically for Zurich, its 1961 premiere taking place after the composer's death. This revision is the one that features on Charles Mackerras's Supraphon recording with the Czech Philharmonic. Aleš Březina then reconstructed the original for David Pountney's Bregenz Festival production, itself recorded in 1999 (Koch Schwann, 10/00 - nla). This new recording on Oehms is also of Martinů's original version (though there's nothing in the booklet to indicate as such), taken from performances at Oper Graz in 2016. The voices on the recording have great presence and there is minimal stage noise.

The score is a minor miracle, Martinů cutting rapidly from scene to scene, a patchwork quilt of many different styles including Greek Orthodox-style psalms and folk elements of recorder and accordion. Dirk Kaftan conducts the Graz Philharmonic in a performance of great sincerity. The opera also includes plenty

of dialogue. Martinů's English text is already clumsy but its delivery in Graz is less than idiomatic, especially when compared with the British stalwarts on Supraphon, but the singing is reasonably strong. Wilfried Zelinka sings the testy priest Grigoris, though lacks the gruff bass authority of John Tomlinson, while Markus Butter is a moving Fotis, the refugees' priest. Swiss tenor Rolf Romei sings most movingly as Manolios, the young shepherd chosen to play Christ, with great attention to text, while Dshamilja Kaiser is a striking Katerina, the villager in love with Manolios. The string phrase when Katerina donates her shawl to one of the refugees is an example of Martinů at his most open-hearted.

Indeed, this is a touching opera and there's a naivety about Martinů's original which makes this recording, despite its flaws, profoundly moving. The booklet includes photographs of the Graz production, which looks rather beautiful. It would be wonderful if a DVD were to appear. Mark Pullinger

Selected comparison: Mackerras (12/81<sup>R</sup>, 3/91) (SUPR) 10 3611-2

### Mozart Die Zauberflöte Martin Piskorski ten ..... Fatma Said sop..... Yasmin Özkan sop......Oueen of the Night Till von Orlowsky bar...... .....Papageno Theresa Zisser sop ......Papagena Martin Summer bass...... .....Sarastro Sascha Emanuel Kramer ten......Monostatos Chorus and Orchestra of La Scala, Milan / Ádám Fischer

Stage director Peter Stein Video director Roberto Maria Grassi C Major Entertainment (F) 222 740408; (F) ≥ 740504 (173' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • O • s) Recorded live, September 21, 2016 Includes synopsis



It's not clear what La Scala intended to capture for posterity in this recording. The singers, orchestra and

chorus are drawn from the La Scala Academy, while the director and conductor are two marquee names, Peter Stein and Ádám Fischer respectively. The end result has quality ingredients but doesn't come to the boil. The worst decisions were made by the professionals.

Peter Stein, 79, is a director whose late career seems to be in full-blown flight away from the radicalism that characterised his

early work in Berlin. While Mozart's Flute cries out for magic and not deconstruction, Stein's milquetoast show gives his young singers and his audience little to chew on.

The most tasteless decision should have been scrapped long before it made a dress rehearsal. Every director of Flute should grapple with Mozart's Enlightenment vision being not so enlightened when it comes to gender and race. But by plopping Sascha Emanuel Kramer's Monostatos in a grass skirt, slathering him in black body paint and surrounding him with a group of whooping, 'primitive' followers in the same garb - more coal-black paint on white bodies - Stein and his costume designer Anna Maria Heinreich simply reinforce what Monostatos tells us about black skins containing black souls. It's gauche, offensive, horribly retrograde.

There are a few nice touches elsewhere but it's hard to find room to praise the thrifty looking Carry-on-up-the-Nile designs by Ferdinand Wögerbauer, cute bird costumes or panto lions, when the colouring-book images also encompass characters not far off Enid Blyton's golliwogs. Dramaturgically, the pace slackens to a crawl in the second half - as it often does if directors aren't inventive – as Papageno and Tamino sit in the gloom and Sarastro's brotherhood assume stock positions, fake beards quivering on young cheeks.

The standout performances come from the central pair of lovers: Tamino may end up not being ideal repertoire for Martin Piskorski's full-blooded tenor but it's a punchy, gutsy effort. The Egyptian soprano Fatma Said is a BBC New Generation Artist and hers is the most complete display of Mozartian grace, capped by a peachy 'Ach, ich fühls'.

Till von Orlowsky is an engaging Papageno but not a natural comedian; and if his amiable pratfalls drew laughs from the Milanese crowd, they've been edited out. Yasmin Özkan's Queen of the Night delivers a full-throttle 'Der Hölle Rache' with wobbly high Fs. Elissa Huber's First Lady is strident, and her laurels are snatched by Lady No 3, the vibrant, fruity mezzo of Mareike Jankowski. There's insufficient gravel and gravitas in Martin Summer's Sarastro, but it's a tough gig for a young man. The chorus are sonorous and well-blended.

Ádám Fischer makes a strong start with the Academy orchestra, in an Overture flickering with lively warmth. As the opera goes on, his choices become more questionable: lingering tempos don't suit an orchestra that has spark but no particular richness of sound. Neil Fisher

### Ravel

| 'Orchestral Works, Vol 5'   |
|---|
| <b>L'enfant et les sortilèges</b> <sup>a</sup> . Ma Mère l'Oye <sup>b</sup> |
| Camille Poul sopL'Enfant  |
| Marie Karall mez  |
| Maman/La Libellule/La Tasse Chinoise  |
| Annick Massis sop   |
| Le Feu/La Princesse/Le Rossignol  |
| Maïlys de Villoutreys sop   |
| La Chauve-souris/La Chouette/Une Pastourelle                                |
| Julie Pasturaud mez   |
| La Bergère/La Chatte/L'Écureuil/Un Pâtre                                    |
| François Piolino ten  |
| La Théière/Le Petit Vieillard/La Rainette                                   |
| Marc Barrard barLa Chat/L'Horloge Comtoise                                  |
| Paul Gay bassLa Fauteuil/Un Arbre   |
| SWR Vocal Ensemble, Stuttgart; Cantus Juvenum                               |
| Karlsruhe; SWR Radio Symphony Orchestra,                                    |
| Stuttgart / Stéphane Denève   |
| SWR Music © SWR19033CD (62' • DDD)  |
| Recorded live at the <sup>b</sup> Liederhalle Stuttgart,                    |
| September 19-20, 2013: <sup>a</sup> Stadthalle Sindelfingen.                |



Ravel was never more sincere than in his works devoted to childhood, the theme

for this fifth volume in Stéphane Denève's Ravel cycle with the SWR Radio Symphony Orchestra, Stuttgart. The spoilt brat of L'enfant et les sortilèges is paired with Ma Mère l'Oye, which was inspired by the fairy tales of Charles Perrault. The opera was recorded in 2015 and must be one of the orchestra's final discs, having merged last autumn with its Baden-Baden and Freiburg sister.

From the intertwined oboes in the prelude to L'enfant, Denève yet again proves himself an exceptionally fine conductor of French repertoire. The playing is pristine, especially in the little interlude as the action moves into the garden, which is magical owl hooting, nightingale twittering, crickets chirruping. It's an exquisite nature study by Ravel that never fails to make its mark.

L'enfant has received a number of recent recordings and several of the cast here can also be found elsewhere. Paul Gay's Armchair is amusingly droll and François Piolino's Arithmétique is full of menace. Annick Massis (also on Leonard Slatkin's Naxos recording) just about negotiates Ravel's fearful coloratura as Fire, but is delightful as the storybook princess. Some of the singing is a little undercharacterised, not least Camille Poul's Child which, although beautifully sung, isn't as wild as other mezzos in wrecking the nursery. Still, with the Stuttgart orchestra slinking through the teapot/china cup foxtrot with such panache, it's difficult



Martinu's Greek Passion, probably his finest stage work, in a beautiful production from Graz Opera

to resist this fresh account. One cavil: no libretto is provided.

The performance of *Ma Mère l'Oye* (taken from a 2013 concert) is full of misty-eyed charm, the Stuttgart woodwinds caressing the 'Sleeping Beauty Pavane' lovingly, while the piccolo and percussion bring exotic glamour to 'The Empress of the Pagodas'. Denève never hurries or crushes this most fragile of scores, even the contrabassoon Beast sounding elegant in his conversations with Beauty. An affectionate disc to appeal to the child in all of us. Mark Pullinger

L'enfant et les sortilèges – selected comparisons: Saito Kinen Orch, Ozawa (9/15) (DECC) 478 6762DH Lyon Nat Orch, Slatkin (12/15) (NAXO) 8 660336 Radio France PO, Franck (6/17) (WARN) 9029 58969-2

| Rossini                                  | NOISO BlurayDist |  |
|--|------------------|--|
| II barbiere di Siviglia                  |                  |  |
| Björn Bürger bar                         | Figaro           |  |
| Danielle de Niese sop                    | Rosina           |  |
| Taylor Stayton ten                       | Almaviva         |  |
| Alessandro Corbelli bar                  | Dr Bartolo       |  |
| Christophoros Stamboglis bass            | Don Basilio      |  |
| Janis Kelly sop                          | Berta            |  |
| Glyndebourne Chorus; London Philharmonic |                  |  |
| Orchestra / Enrique Mazzola              |                  |  |

Opus Arte (Ē) ♣ OA1238D; (Ē) ♣ OABD7218D (164' + 8' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA, DD & LPCM stereo • 0 • s) Recorded live, June 21, 2016 Includes synopsis



This 2016 Glyndebourne production of Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* was the first to be staged there since the elegantly judged

1981 John Cox production, which survives on DVD in a TVS telecast directed by the legendary Dave Heather. The cue for the new production was the bicentenary of the opera's *prima* in Rome in 1816; that, and the chance to cast as Rosina Glyndebourne's current châtelaine, the soprano Danielle de Niese.

Vocally de Niese is a decent Rosina, for all that her acting doesn't wear well on the small screen. Indeed, most of the acting is broad-brush in Annabel Arden's relentlessly busy production, not least Björn Bürger's Figaro. This rakishly tall young German baritone is probably a Don Giovanni to die for but he's no Figaro. Meanwhile others, such as Alessandro Corbelli, who should have been be shoe-ins for their roles, are

left with little to play with or against. Stripped of all doctoral dignity, Corbelli's Dr Bartolo ends up bearing an alarming resemblance to Manuel in *Fawlty Towers*.

Despite conceding that the opera's style is classical in essence, Arden shows scant regard for the comic realism that is key to Beaumarchais's method, and to Rossini's. Obsessed by what she mistakenly believes to be the work's 'Spanish' character, she plays the strangest of stylistic games – witness the flying harpsichords in the *stretta* to the Act 1 finale, which are more Salvador Dalí than Gioachino Rossini.

Joanna Parker's abstract, predominantly blue-toned Moorish backdrop is equally bizarre: wrong both for the opera's bespoke settings and for the production's visibility on the small screen during the darker sequences. (Blue kills most things unless it's expensively lit.) Bartolo's bookcases provide a semblance of realism in Act 2. But these are poorly conceived designs in comparison with those William Dudley provided for the 1981 production. And the 1981 cast, led by John Rawnsley and Maria Ewing, is much the better of the two.

Even that, however, yields pride of place to Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's superlative 1971-72 filmed recreation of his celebrated Milan staging. There are those who said

Stage director Annabel Arden

Video director François Roussillon

that for Ponnelle too much was never enough, but not here. Since he's his own musically literate director, designer and film-maker, the interplay of music, acting and *mise en scène* is glorious to look at and endlessly entertaining – without for a moment guying the opera itself, as on occasion Arden (to the audience's apparent delight) is happy to do. There is genius, too, in the myriad small details with which Ponnelle takes Rossini's *Il barbiere* back to its Beaumarchais original.

Though the booklet makes no mention of the fact, Glyndebourne 2016 has an extra aria for Rosina before the Act 2 storm. Written for Joséphine Fodor-Mainvielle for Venice in 1819, and derived in part from Rossini's *Sigismondo* (Venice, 1814), it's as dramatically redundant as it is stylistically at odds with the language of *Il barbiere* – another misjudgement in a production that has more than its fair share of them. **Richard Osborne** 

Selected comparisons:

Abbado, r1971-72 (3/02<sup>R</sup>, 8/05) (DG) 073 4039GH Cambreling, r1981 (WARN) 4509 99223-2

### Saint-Saëns

### 

#### Flemish Radio Choir; Munich Radio Orchestra / Ulf Schirmer

Ediciones Singulares (© ② ES1027 (95' • DDD) Includes synopsis, text and translation



Of Saint-Saëns's 13 operas, only *Samson et Dalila* is a repertory staple. Palazzetto Bru Zane's mission to promote rare French

works has already yielded a recording of *Les Barbares*, which is now joined by the composer's sixth opera, *Proserpine*, a tale of passion set in Renaissance Florence. Boiled down to its essentials, the plot concerns Sabatino's love for two women: Angiola, the virginal sister of his friend, Renzo; and Proserpine, a courtesan. Proserpine rejects Sabatino, even though she has fallen in love with him, but she is jealous of Angiola and attempts to kill her. Sabatino wards off the blow, only for Proserpine to stab herself.

Saint-Saëns was very enthusiastic about his opera, travelling to Florence to soak up

the atmosphere and later composing at great speed. Apart from Act 2, though, set in a convent, the score wasn't well received. Camille Bellaigue complained that the drama didn't really begin until Act 3 ... which is where he felt the music began to slide downhill. Saint-Saëns's score was dismissed as too Wagnerian, or too symphonic – possibly because the *Organ* Symphony had secured his reputation as an orchestral rather than operatic composer. Commentators had their petty digs, playing on the composer's name: 'Cinq sens, mais pas d'âme' (Five senses, but no soul)!

This recording, made last autumn in Munich under the baton of Ulf Schirmer, reveals Saint-Saëns's score to be compact, with each of its four acts having a distinct flavour. A pretty siciliana and a stately pavane help evoke the Florentine palazzo of Act 1, while a pretty, Gounod-like Ave Maria opens the convent scene. A stylish tarantella opens Act 3, where Proserpine is disguised as a gypsy, suggesting shades of Carmen (there's even a fortune-telling scene as she tries to put the frighteners on Angiola). The brief Act 4 is pure melodrama, even when Auguste Vacquerie's original ending to his play, from which Louis Gallet based his libretto, was watered down from two murders to a single suicide.

The cast is led by Véronique Gens in the title-role, her ever-expressive colouring of text superb, from scornful and haughty courtesan to desperate lover. The role was written for a 'falcon' (somewhere between a dramatic soprano and mezzo), taken at the premiere by Caroline Salla, who had starred in Le timbre d'argent (the next of Saint-Saëns's operas to be resurrected by Palazzetto Bru Zane). Gens doesn't have the heftiest soprano but does great justice to the role. She is well contrasted with Marie-Adeline Henry's angelic soprano as Angiola. Frédéric Antoun is a stylish Sabatino, even if he hasn't the most ringing top notes, while Jean Teitgen's woolly bass doesn't have a great deal to do as Renzo. Andrew Foster-Williams's biting baritone makes for a splendid Squarocca, the rogue who acts as Proserpine's spy. The Munich Radio Orchestra impress, particularly in the pulsating entr'acte depicting Proserpine's flight back to Florence.

The discs are housed in a lavishly documented hardback book, which includes a superb analysis of the score by Gérard Condé as well as Saint-Saëns's self-defence of the work, which he originally published as a pamphlet in 1902. The composer could never understand why his opera never achieved success with critics and the public: 'I persist in finding *Proserpine* excellent.

The future will show I was right.' This new recording does his opera full justice.

Mark Pullinger

### Steffani

| Baccanali                         |               |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| Nicolò Donini bass                | Atlas         |
| Riccardo Angelo Strano counterten | Bacchus/Tirsi |
| Barbara Massaro sop               | Driade        |
| Vittoria Magnarello sop           | Celia         |
| Paola Leoci sop                   | Clori         |
| Elena Caccamo <i>mez</i>          | Aminta        |
| Chiara Manese mez                 | Fileno        |
| Yasushi Watanabe ten              | Ergasto       |
|                                   |               |

Ensemble Cremona Antiqua / Antonio Greco Dynamic ® ② CDS7770 (85' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, text and translation



Agostino Steffani (1654-1728) is an interesting figure. Italian by birth,

he spent his working life in Germany. Composer, priest – bishop, indeed – and diplomat, friend of Leibniz, he was a significant influence on Handel and other German composers of the day. His opera *Niobe, regina di Tebe* has been staged and recorded twice (Erato, 3/15; Opus Arte, 5/15), and he was the featured composer of Cecilia Bartoli's 'Mission' (Decca, 12/12). He remains below the radar, though, so the opportunity of getting to know a new piece (in a first-ever recording) is to be welcomed.

Truth to tell, Baccanali, staged in Hanover in 1695, is not a gripping drama. It's a pastoral divertimento that begins with Atlas announcing that mortals can get relief from their sufferings during a festival consecrated to Bacchus; at the end, Bacchus himself arrives to celebrate wine, the antidote to all sorrow. In between are scenes for the shepherds Aminta and Tirsi and the nymphs Clori and Celia. Driade, daughter of Pan, is mocked for her fear of men; in a game of Blind Man's Buff she is made to catch Fileno, whom the nymphs had teased for his lack of success in love. Another shepherd, Ergasto, laments his lot (reason unexplained).

No, not a gripping drama, but entertaining in its way. The music includes *da capo* arias, dances such as the gavotte and the gigue, and a French overture to introduce the proceedings. Some arias are accompanied only by the continuo; others include passages with violins, oboes or what the booklet calls flutes but which to me sound like recorders. The most touching aria, and at seven minutes by far the longest, is Ergasto's 'Cara pace, dolce calma', a slow, gentle number which deserves more



 $Christian\ Thielemann's\ Verdi\ Otello\ from\ the\ 2016\ Salzburg\ Easter\ Festival\ is\ a\ glossy,\ high-quality\ affair$ 

expressiveness than Yasushi Watanabe seems prepared to offer. Vittoria Magnarello and Paola Leoci make a jolly pair of nymphs, to whom Steffani gives catch-me-if-you-can imitative writing; jollity of a more surprising kind comes in 'Per non riveder huomini', where the roulades of Barbara Massaro's put-upon Driade are quite at odds with the despairing words. Nicolò Donini shows off a fine bass but sadly is not heard after the opening scene. The tiny band under Antonio Greco play neatly.

For once, praise to Dynamic for including a booklet with the libretto and English translation. In the accompanying article, the confusion between 'patera' (a dish for libations) and 'pantera' raises the bar for mistranslation to a new, hilarious level ('Bubbling panther, delightful liquor'). Richard Lawrence

| Verdi                   | OVD S     |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| Otello                  |           |
| José Cura ten           | Otello    |
| Carlos Álvarez bar      | lago      |
| Dorothea Röschmann sop  | Desdemona |
| Benjamin Bernheim ten   | Cassio    |
| Bror Magnus Tødenes ten | Roderigo  |
| Georg Zeppenfeld bass   | Lodovico  |
| Csaba Szegedi bar       | Montano   |
| Gordon Bintner bass-bar | Herald    |
| Christa Mayer mez       | Emilia    |

### Saxon State Opera Chorus; Salzburg Festival and Theatre Children's Chorus; Staatskapelle Dresden / Christian Thielemann

Stage director Vincent Boussard
Video director Tiziano Mancini

C Major Entertainment ⊕ 2740008;

E 2740104 (147' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD
MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Grosses Festspielhaus,
Salzburg, March 16-27, 2016
Includes synopsis



After a compelling *Cav &* Pag in 2015 – released on DVD by Sony Classical, 5/16 – the Salzburg Easter Festival's

new *Otello* from 2016 is a bit of a disappointment. There's a great deal in it of high quality, but those elements fail to come together to create the explosive drama that Verdi's final tragic masterpiece should present.

First is Vincent Boussard's production itself, which is stylish and smart but ultimately rather inert and anonymous. Vincent Lemaire's set is very plain, often consisting of just an open stage or a wall halfway back with a door in it. A recurring motif of billowing material (either real or

projected) seems to hint at the sail of Otello's ship as much as Desdemona's handkerchief. We also have an 'angel', who stalks around the stage with dark wings, often indulging in earnest interactions with the characters – steering their fates, suffering their pain. But it's never really that clear where we are, or who these people are – and Christian Lacroix's smart costumes don't offer many pointers either.

At the head of the cast, José Cura's Otello is in pretty good shape – he's been singing the role for nearly two decades now - and his tenor can still deliver plenty of thrills. Dramatically, though, he seems a little ill at ease in his minimalist surroundings, his acting coming across at times as strangely lugubrious. Carlos Álvarez was also Iago in the previous Otello film to come from Salzburg (conducted by Riccardo Muti in 2008, in Stephen Langridge's more concrete production). Here he sings well but is a rather neutral presence. Dorothea Röschmann, though never really sounding truly Italianate, at least does all she can to give Desdemona some fire: hers is a moving, unusually feisty account of the role. Benjamin Bernheim is an excellent Cassio, and Georg Zeppenfeld stands out for his resonant Lodovico.

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The playing of the Staatskapelle Dresden oozes quality, and Christian Thielemann certainly offers an interpretation of imposing grandeur and sonic richness. But it's not a reading that ever truly gets its hands dirty with what should on occasions be a drama of earthy, visceral passion.

This is a glossy, high-quality *Otello* with some solid virtues. But that earlier Salzburg film (with the excellent young Aleksandrs Antonenko as Otello and an on-form Marina Poplavskaya as Desdemona) makes for more moving viewing. Hugo Shirley *Selected comparison:* 

Muti (CMAJ) 2 725008; 701504 or 725104

Wagner Parsifal



Christopher Ventris ten.......Parsifal
Alejandro Marco-Buhrmester bar ......Amfortas
Falk Struckmann bass-bar .......Gurnemanz
Petra Lang sop......Kundry
Mikhail Petrenko bass .......Klingsor/Titurel

Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra / Iván Fischer

Stage director Pierre Audi
Video director Misjel Vermeiren
Challenge Classics (F) (2002 + 2022) CC72619
(4h 8' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1,
DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)
Recorded live, June & July 2012
Includes synopsis



'I was not thinking of the Redeemer when I created *Parsifal*', wrote Wagner. In ceremonial moments stage director

Pierre Audi and his team – including artist Anish Kapoor as set designer - rightly eschew any Christian symbolism deriving from latter-day Mass rituals, opting instead (in the first Grail scene) for images of blood and sacrifice. Audi takes a hard but wholly justifiable line with the brothers' treatment of their failed leader Amfortas. They cannot bear to touch him or to be near him (no litter to carry him to a supposedly healing bath; he has to stagger there), while the final scene shows a right-wing coup with the newly re-armed knights - that's actually in the production notes for Wagner's own premiere staging! - attempting to force him to reveal the Grail once more.

Here we are refreshingly light years away from imitations of Siena cathedral or the gardens in Ravello. The first act, like the piece itself, is visually rather crowded with people and props trying to mend things – Gurnemanz's nightmare of the wounded Amfortas in the Prelude, the carpenter's shop attempts to make crosses and the rough scaffolding towers which are the

beginning (or the remains) of a Grail hall. Acts 2 and 3 are pretty bare so as to focus on the psychology of Kundry and her redeemer/almost-lover Parsifal. This filming spares us what were apparently acoustic blips in Act 2 caused by Klingsor's large mirror and has the Act 1 transformations (played in the theatre with curtain down) more reminiscent of time becoming space via extra footage of Parsifal and Gurnemanz walking through smoke.

As in his Ring, Audi has achieved performances of exceptional emotional detail from his soloists, none more than Petra Lang's Kundry, who gives us everything apart from the high tessitura at the end of Act 2 that only Kirsten Flagstad really managed. Her relationship with and looks at Christopher Ventris's Parsifal in Act 3 bring tears to the eyes - the relationship that can never happen, liberated again in the baptism scenes from over-derivative biblical references. A great achievement for this artist. Ventris too - and bravely - achieves a perfect unmannered neutrality, never rushing in voice or face the revelations that come to him from the Act 2 duet onwards.

The other principals make up a supportive team. Struckmann, an Amfortas on previous DVDs, is a baritonal Gurnemanz, another success for him in older Wagner roles. His controlled suffering and well-worked text make most effect in Act 1 and the final act's focus on Kundry doesn't pull emotional attention from him. Marco-Buhrmester manages Amfortas's physical afflictions with skill and Petrenko (also heard but not seen as Titurel) creates a genuinely spooky Klingsor without recourse to camp or hysteria. All – and the choruses – sing well for Fischer's careful, expertly played symphonic accompaniment. He does not rely on the massive climaxes of older German masters or their more expressionist colours but manages subtly to up the pace at moments (eg the knights' Act 1 'hymn' to their bread and wine) where lesser readings might stick.

Well filmed and recorded, this is an essential purchase for Lang and for Audi's direction, a straight but strong rival to existing competition from Barenboim/ Kupfer and Nagano/Lehnhoff. Mike Ashman Selected comparisons:

Barenboim (EURO) **20**7 6738 Nagano (OPAR) **2** OABD7063D

### 'Arias for Nicolino'

Handel Amadigi di Gaula - SInfonia; T'amai, quant'il mio cor. **Rinaldo** - Overture; Prelude; Cara sposa, amante cara; Di speranza un bel raggio ... Venti, turbini,prestate; Tale stupor m'occupa i sensi, e tale ... Cor ingrato, ti rammembri **Pergolesi**  Al real piede ognora; Per trucidar la perfida Sarro Arsace - Introduzione; Torni ai ceppi e vo incontro alla morte ... Eccoti al fine, o Arsace ... Se penso a Statira A Scarlatti II Cambise - Quando vedrai; Mi cinga la fama

Carlo Vistoli counterten

Talenti Vulcanici / Stefano Demicheli hpd Arcana (© A427 (62' • DDD • T/t)



The Neapolitan castrato Nicola Grimaldi (1673-1732), nicknamed

Nicolino (or Nicolini), studied at the Conservatorio della Pietà dei Turchini, first appeared on stage at the age of 12 in an opera by Provenzale and proceeded to perform in over 100 productions across nearly half a century. In Venice he was awarded the Cross of St Mark and at the peak of his powers he created the title-roles in Handel's early London operas *Rinaldo* (1711) and *Amadigi* (1715); he also sang in new works by Alessandro Scarlatti, Gasparini, Sarro, Leo and Hasse, and it was only his death that prevented him from taking part in the first performances of Pergolesi's *Salustia*.

A few years ago Dmitry Egorov and La Stagione Frankfurt presented an attractively varied assortment of music for Nicolino by Handel and Scarlatti (DHM, 2011), whereas Carlo Vistoli performs a slightly different selection of Handel arias (with less variety of instrumentation) alongside music by Sarro, Scarlatti and Pergolesi. Talenti Vulcanini's strings play with a sure sense of harmonic delineation in Rinaldo's famous lament 'Cara sposa', which is sung with visceral passion and musicality, although overt embellishments oscillate between insightful amplification of emotion and distracting distortions. Vistoli's supple facility for rapid passagework is to the fore in 'Tono ai ceppi' from Sarro's Arsace (Naples, 1718), communicative articulacy is typified by 'Mi cinga la fama' from Scarlatti's Cambise (Naples, 1719) and there is pathos aplenty in 'Al real piede ognora' from Salustia (Naples, 1732).

Aside from some momentary imperfections in the strings' intonation, the youthful 'volcanic talents' play with theatrical tautness and élan, and are directed by harpsichordist Stefano Demicheli with a reliable sense of pacing, detail and texture. Neither Egorov nor Vistoli achieve an ideally balanced and comprehensive survey of Nicolino's entire career and repertoire, so perhaps that ship has sailed for the time being. David Vickers

The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

azz

Brought to you by Jazzwise

### **Regina Carter**

Ella: Accentuate The Positive Okeh ® 88985406042



Featuring beautifully crafted arrangements of beguiling variety and sensuousness, in every lovingly caressed phrase of

Ella: Accentuate The Positive, Regina Carter's love for the First Lady of Song's music shines brightly. Her chosen material, with one or two notable exceptions, judiciously focuses on some of the lesser known gems associated with Ella. Listening to the way in which Carter seductively bends the notes in 'I'll Never Be Free' and 'I'll Chase The Blues Away', and how she sculpts the long, sustained invention of 'Judy', it's clear that there's not a semiquaver that hasn't been fastidiously considered. Featuring her long-time rhythm section of bassist Chris

Lightcap and drummer Alvester Garnett, together with pianist Xavier Davis and guitarist Marvin Sewell, Carter's musicians are completely attuned to her vision and artistry. Actress and singer Miche Braden delivers the hugely powerful, gospel-soaked title track, while vocalist Carla Cook's mellifluous timbre beguiles in a spacious R&B arrangement of 'Undecided' by Charenee Wade. Peter Quinn

### **Scott Hamilton**

The Shadow of Your Smile

Blau (F) 016



Once the boy wonder of neo-mainstream, Scott Hamilton is now, unbelievably, in his early 60s. No longer tied to

his US Concord contract, he records prolifically in and around Europe. Recent

releases have worked rather like a Cook's tour of the continent, taking in the UK, France, Switzerland and Denmark, with a significant cluster in Spain, and Benicassim in particular, this 2015 concert session just the latest in his Iberian sequence. Every piece here is played by Hamilton with a kind of languid ease, each melodic variation following the other, quite inexorably, his sumptuous tenor sound brilliantly caught in this live recording. There's an unhurried quality to his approach, a lived-in character to his phrase-making that is very engaging and while it might lack the fire and brimstone of youth, it is compensated for by the well-honed values of experience. Pianist Dena DeRose sings too, on 'How Deep Is The Ocean', and plays her boppish clusters with real authority while Ignasi Gonzalez, a carry-over from an earlier release, makes every step a swinger. Make no mistake: Hamilton still has a lot to offer. Peter Vacher

# World Music

Brought to you by SONGLINES

### Maria Kalaniemi & Eero Grundström

Svalar

Åkerö Records (F) ÅKERÖCD17



Maria Kalaniemi's latest release *Svalan* (Swallow) shows her heading into the countryside of her childhood, and making

friends with the owls and bears in the Finnish forests. I've long been an admirer of the accordionist; now I've decided I'd like to go travelling with her. You can hear a sense of freedom in her voice as she remembers Swedish-Finnish ballads, while the elegance of her accordion playing, for which she is renowned, becomes part of a natural landscape that mixes beauty and danger, and the sounds of the birds and animals. Of course I couldn't possibly match the brilliance of her travelling

companions: Eero Grundström playing a harmonium that folds down like some portable barbecue; guitarist Mikko Kosonen; and jouhikko (Finnish bowed lyre) player Pekko Käppi. Kalaniemi also thanks Noksu the raven and Apassi the wolfdog... Whether evocative of freezing nights or long rainy days, each track takes us into some wild place with trusted and inspiring musical friends. Fiona Talkington

### **Kronos Quartet**

Folk Songs

Nonesuch © 559151



There are few more reliable guarantees of quality in contemporary music than if the name Kronos appears on the tin.

Perhaps best known for their interpretations of minimalists such as Reich, Riley, Glass and Pärt, the quartet also has a proud record in world music collaborations. This album is a journey into Appalachian tradition and its origins in the antique folk balladry of the British Isles – and it is as magnificent as you would expect. Combining ancient modal drones, classical elegance and avant-garde subversion, the quartet create a compelling sound-bed for four voices of contrasting character. Natalie Merchant hauntingly reworks 'Johnny Has Gone for a Soldier' from the American revolutionary war and 'The Butcher's Boy', while Rhiannon Giddens offers a spookily mournful take on the Irish ballad 'Factory Girl'. Sam Amidon brilliantly captures the lonesome mountain sound on 'Oh Where' and Olivia Chaney delivers 'Ramblin' Boy' with deathless beauty. Folk and classical traditions can seldom have come together so gloriously since Vaughan Williams's English Folk Song Suite almost a century ago. Nigel Williamson

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### UNIVERSITYOF BIRMINGHAM

# Birmingham International Piano Festival 27 Oct - 4 Nov 2017

We are thrilled to present the 2017 Birmingham International Piano Festival — where we bring some of the world's finest pianists and keyboard players to Birmingham. Performances will take place in the University of Birmingham's world class concert halls in the Bramall Music Building and The Barber Institute of Fine Arts between Friday 27 October and Saturday 4 November 2017.

| 27 October | 1.10pm | Kenneth Hamilton piano                    |                    |
|------------|--------|---|--------------------|
| 27 October | 7.30pm | Syd Lawrence Orchestra                    | _                  |
| 28 October | 7.30pm | European Union Chamber Orchestra with Ste | ven Devine<br>nord |
| 1 November | 7.30pm | Benjamin Grosvenor piano                  |                    |
| 3 November | 1.10pm | Ksenija Sidorova accordion                |                    |
| 4 November | 2pm    | Songs About Us family concert             |                    |

Admission: Free - £22. See website for details.

Tickets + Info

birminghampianofestival.com

# MUSICAL CONNECTIONS

### Prompted by our focus on Elgar, James Jolly offers a pair of related listening journeys

### Two Brits abroad

As we consider Sir Edward Elgar's place within the international music scene - his Cello Concerto being one of the most performed of all 20th-century concertante works for the instrument - what of two other British composers, very much chalk and cheese? Ralph Vaughan Williams is utterly steeped in the musical traditions of this country and for many is the quintessential English symphonist of the middle years of the 20th century, while William Walton, once the Continental European-facing wild child, is a composer who could deliver music of almost Imperial splendour. One of the most striking recordings of an RVW symphony came from Leonard Bernstein and the New York PO, in the Fourth, back in 1965. As Andrew Achenbach wrote in his Sir Edward Elgar: great composer, fine conductor Collection (May 2014), it's 'just a little

heavy on its pins and ... even a touch indulgent, though there's much to savour' – and the latter is particularly evident in the string-writing and the urgency of what is a pretty fierce score. Altogether more 'English' is the Fifth Symphony which receives a slightly cool reading, but with some ravishing detail, from the Atlanta SO and Robert Spano. RVW's Sixth, also recorded in New York, finds the subject of this month's Icons, Leopold Stokowski (a fellow pupil of RVW at the RCM), on the podium. It's a direct reading that refuses to wallow, and once again the New York Phil are on top form.

Walton's Violin Concerto is possibly an even more 'international' work than Elgar's, so it's no surprise that it has been embraced by non-British soloists, orchestras and conductors. Joshua Bell's Decca recording won the Gramophone Concerto Award in 1998 and, with David Zinman and his fine Baltimore orchestra on top form, this remains a major front-runner. Walton's Viola Concerto, rather less-often encountered, receives a terrific (live) recording from soloist Roberto Díaz (formerly Principal with the Philadelphia Orchestra) and the New Haven Symphony under William Boughton. And the Cello Concerto receives a superb performance in Oslo under a great Walton conductor, André Previn, with Daniel Müller-Schott as the superb soloist.

Vaughan Williams Symphony No 4 NYPO / Bernstein Sonv Classical

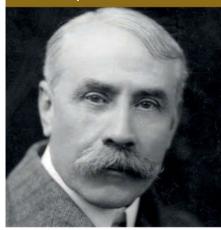
Vaughan Williams Symphony No 5 Atlanta SO / Spano Telarc

Vaughan Williams Symphony No 6 NYPO / Stokowski

Walton Vn Concerto Bell: Baltimore SO / Zinman Decca Walton Va Concerto Díaz; New Haven SO / Boughton Nimbus

Walton Cello Concerto Müller-Schott; Oslo PO / Previn Orfeo

The reputation of Elgar's music abroad inspires a playlist exploring British music in non-British hands, while Elgar's work as a conductor prompts tracks featuring six more composer-conductors



### Composer-conductors

For Barenboim, Elgar as a conductor was 'in total command of the orchestra'. Composer-conductors are not uncommon, but very few are able to accomplish both disciplines to an equally high level. Here are six more who could easily have specialised in one or other field in the highest echelons of the profession. **Benjamin Britten** was not only a great composer and a magnificent pianist but a superb conductor, and while he was obviously encouraged to record his own music, he did leave a modest discography of non-Britten. Forced to narrow it down, I would have to choose Mozart's Piano Concerto No 27 with Clifford Curzon as soloist, ironically a recording Curzon did not give permission for release. He need not have worried – it's heavenly.

**Leonard Bernstein's** musical sympathies

were immense and his discography vast. Pressed to select a single performance to illustrate his art, I'd opt for Mahler's Fifth Symphony with the Vienna Philharmonic. And Mahler is also my choice for **Pierre Boulez** as conductor – Das Lied von der Erde, recorded in Vienna with Violeta Urmana and Michael Schade as the strong soloists. 'So many recent recordings of Mahler's masterpiece have not measured up to the work's exigent demands', wrote Alan Blyth back in April 2001, 'that it is a great pleasure to hear one that does. This performance can be welcomed as something quite out of the ordinary, indeed a reading to place among the best the piece has ever received.' André Previn, so fine in British music (see opposite), recorded a searing account of Britten's Sinfonia da Requiem in 1975 with an LSO on ruggedly electric form – and it still sounds terrific. Oliver Knussen is a wonderful conductor and I have long cherished his London Sinfonietta recording of Henze's *Undine* for DG; some stunning playing and amazing colours make this a really overwhelming experience. And how to celebrate the artistry of Esa-Pekka Salonen on the podium? Look no further than his LA recording of Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony of which Edward Seckerson wrote: 'It's a "composerly" account in which every thematic connection, however oblique, has something to say. Clarity is forensic, with the Los Angeles Philharmonic achieving levels of

precision that can ... totally suspend disbelief.'

To explore these playlists via a streaming service, or to create your own, we suggest gobuz.com. You can listen to these particular playlists at gramophone.co.uk/playlists

Mozart Piano Concerto No 27, K595 Curzon; ECO / Britten Decca

Mahler Symphony No 5 VPO / Bernstein DG Mahler Das Lied von der Erde Urmana; Schade; VPO / Boulez DG

Britten Sinfonia da Requiem LSO / Previn **EMI/Warner Classics** 

Henze Undine London Sinf / Knussen DG Shostakovich Symphony No 4 LAPO / Salonen DG

# REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

# Harpsichord royalty

Two great players return with the music of JS Bach and his family

ard on the heals of Erato's magnificent 20-CD set devoted to the art of the nonagenarian harpsichordist Zuzana Růžičková in mostly solo Bach (Replay, January) comes a generously-filled Supraphon double-pack of the seven solo Bach concertos with robust, broadly paced accompaniments by the Prague Chamber Orchestra under Václav Neumann. As with the Erato set Mahan Esfahani provides some guiding words of wisdom, not least by relating that the D minor and E major works were recorded just a month after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia (1968), 'the original sessions having been cancelled due to noisy interference from actual invasion itself'. Inevitably this fact brings to mind recording sessions from almost 30 years earlier when Růžičková's role model Wanda Landowska was recording Scarlatti in Paris to a backdrop of anti-aircraft fire.

Růžičková and Neumann conspire to underline the D minor's incipient sense of drama, a feeling that darkens to tragedy in the slow movement where Růžičková's instrument seems to draw towards the front of the soundstage. The Fifth Concerto is a similar case in point, especially the top line and accompaniment of central Largo which are unforgettably entwined, like lovelorn lutenists playing below the beloved's window. Here the outer movements are more spirited, unlike No 6 (c/f the Fourth Brandenburg Concerto) where textures are heavily weighted and the central Andante unfolds in slow, long-breathed sentences. Perhaps my favourite performance in the set is of the Second Concerto in E major, the second movement Siciliano quietly comforting, the outer movements superbly articulated and relatively understated. As ever with Růžičková, varied registrations intensify the sense of colour and rhythms are kept on a tight though never rigid rein. Wisdom and patience seem to be the watchwords for these performances, which are consistently memorable even in view

of a few passing (and fairly superficial) reservations relating to their overall style.

Růžičková's Supraphon record of the two big Bach concertos was preceded in the early stereo field by Decca versions featuring centenarian (as of 2017) George Malcolm and the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra under Karl Münchinger, recordings that date from 1963 and performances that while conceptually not dissimilar to Růžičková's (certainly as far as Malcolm's varied employment of registrations is concerned) are marginally swifter and lighter in tone. A more significant difference occurs in the Adagio of the D minor Concerto where Münchinger opts for contrasting string sonorities. Although the opening unison tutti is played on full strings, once Malcolm enters (at around the one minute mark) Münchinger cues a group of solo players which makes for a very intimate effect. The differences are less marked in the case of the E major Concerto, though I still incline marginally towards Růžičková's version. Malcolm's concertos come coupled with a sombre if deeply musical statement of The Art of Fugue as arranged by Leonard Isaacs, leaving out the magnificently elaborate but uncompleted Fuga a 3 soggetti. Malcolm directs members of the excellent Philomusica of London who combine, or alternate, winds and strings. The playing has a sense of inward communing about it - though I wouldn't recommend listening at a single sitting.

Malcolm's seemingly symbiotic musical relationship with Sir Neville Marriner's Academy of St Martin in the Fields resulted in a superb series of recordings, some of which have appeared on a single Eloquence disc. It opens with a lively Thomas Arne sequence (the Fifth Harpsichord Concerto in G minor is real gem) then proceeding to a trio of works by CPE Bach, its centrepiece a set of solo Variations on *Les Folies d'Espagne*, and ending with a C minor Concerto. Also included in an

A minor Concerto by JC Bach. Here as elsewhere on the disc Malcolm is at his most animated and flamboyant.

If you want to sample Malcolm as a virtuoso showman then The World of George Malcolm (based on an extremely popular bargain LP) would be pretty hard to beat. Bach provides a nourishing main course with vital, colour-conscious performances of the Italian Concerto, Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue, Fifth French Suite and D major Toccata BWV912 while the range of miniatures programmed extends from Couperin, Daquin and Paradies, and Rameau, through 'The Flight of the Bumblebee' to a pair of quasi-jazz 'fun' pieces centred around the theme of Bach, Alec Templeton's Bach Goes to Town and Malcolm's own Bach before the Mast. I used to enjoy these last five on a Decca 45rpm 'extended play' record ('Mr Malcolm Goes to Town', SEC5502) which I virtually wore out. Lovely to hear them again, as well as the rest of these delightful selections, in such excellent transfers.

### THE RECORDINGS



Bach Harpsichord Concertos Růžičková; Prague Chamber Soloists / Neumann Supraphon (1) ② SU4222-2



Bach Harpsichord Concertos. The Art of Fugue Malcolm; Stuttgart CO / Münchinger Decca Eloquence (a) 2 482 5187



Arne. CPE Bach. JC Bach Harpsichord Concertos Malcolm; ASMF / Marriner Decca Eloquence ® 482 5117



**'The World of George Malcolm'**Decca Eloquence ® 482 5181

96 GRAMOPHONE AUGUST 2017 gramophone.co.uk



One of the UK's most influential musicians, George Malcolm is celebrated on a trio of Eloquence reissues

### Pioneering Brandenburgs

Among the first sets of Brandenburg Concertos to appear in stereo was the one that Harry Newstone and the Hamburg Chamber Orchestra recorded in 1959 and that Saga released on two LPs, first at full price then as a bargain that meant affordable access for a whole host of fledgling collectors. Rival versions cropped up from time to time but, as Heritage Records now proves, these characterful Newstone recordings (which were rightly praised in these pages when they were first released) revisited high standards that had not been heard since the pre-War versions by the Busch Chamber Players. Tempos here are extremely well judged, especially in the Fifth Concerto with violinist Friedrich Wührer junior, flautist Gertrud Weitz and, most impressive, harpsichordist Waldemar Döhling who also made a solo Bach recital for Saga which I remember with some fondness. Under Newstone the buoyancy of the playing, especially in the first movement of the Third Concerto (note how excitingly the basses crescendo around the movement's climax) makes a favourable impression and I love the prominent double-bass sonority in the Sixth Concerto, the Adagio so feelingly played. Wührer is especially brilliant in the first movement of Brandenburg No 4 and Adolph Scherbaum's B flat trumpet rings resplendent in the Second Concerto. Although occasionally a little cramped, the sound comes up remarkably well, certainly considering the date and the vinyl sources used. A valuable release with excellent notes by Tully Potter.

#### THE RECORDING



Bach Brandenburg Concertos
Newstone; Hamburg Chamber
Orchestra
Heritage ® ② HTGCD 195/6

### Zukerman plays Vivaldi

It's not often that a single set affords the opportunity of comparing two performances by the same soloist, at least not beyond the realms of historic recordings, but in the case of Sony Classical's Pinchas Zukerman plays Vivaldi two versions of The Four Seasons are chalk and cheese. The first, recorded in March 1972 with the English Chamber Orchestra, promotes a stylistically unadorned, traditionally honeyed approach that was fairly typical of Zukerman at that time, his playing direct and tonally appealing. Jump to January 1980 and although we're obviously listening to the same player, much has changed. The Saint Paul CO produces a far richer sound than the ECO and Zukerman himself is more prone to embellish the line. The obvious place to sample is 'Winter', its central largo with its pizzicato 'raindrops' accompaniment, all relatively straightforward in 1972 but eight years later the second statement of the theme is subject to a good deal of attractive decoration. This is a beautiful performance. As to the rest of the set, we hear other solo concertos, concertos for two and three violins with Isaac Stern and Itzhak Perlman, and multiple violin concertos with various ECO members. Stylish playing, expressively generous with rhythmically focused

accompaniments, 'well matured' in the best sense of the phrase, meaning like vintage wine. Good sound, too.

### THE RECORDING



'Pinchas Zukerman plays Vivaldi' English Chamber Orchestra / Zukerman vn RCA Red Seal § 6 8898 537098-2

### Mendelssohn bargain

Another RCA set is devoted to recordings of Mendelssohn orchestral music that Claus Peter Flor made with the Bamberg SO back in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Six extremely well-filled discs cover the numbered symphonies, the major overtures, the solo concertos (violin – both the much-loved E minor and the early D minor with strings - with Kyoko Takezawa and piano with Sergei Edelmann), Die erste Walpurgisnacht, A Midsummer Night's Dream and, most valuable perhaps, an imaginatively orchestrated sequence of songs 'with' and 'without' words, Leise zieht durch mein Gemüth, arranged by Siegfried Matthus and featuring the bright, lyric tenor voice of Deon van der Walt. Ouite magical!

Flor's way with Mendelssohn is fairly soft-grained, an impression supported by pleasantly mellifluous if rather muted sound. This works best in the heartwarming Adagio religioso slow movement of the Second Symphony, Hymn of Praise, but come the transition to the huge choral finale, and the cry 'Everything that has breath praise the Lord' (sung in German) and there's a conspicuous lack of impact. On the other hand Flor is at great pains to have his violins play very softly in the Midsummer Night's Dream Overture; the Scherzo is appealingly relaxed and we have the beautiful voice of Lucia Popp in 'Ye spotted snakes'. The coda of the Scottish Symphony is unusually jaunty, the concertos well-played and the First Symphony given perhaps the most extrovert performance in the set. Anyone wishing to explore this magical repertoire could usefully use Flor as a starting point, making sure to explore recorded comparisons once the works have been absorbed. Alas, there's no information on the music.

### THE RECORDING



**'Claus Peter Flor conducts Mendelssohn'** RCA Red Seal (§) (6) 8898 539356-2

# Books



## Rob Cowan on a new Toscanini biography from Harvey Sachs:

When benign rage is a symptom of selfless dedication rather than pathological narcissism or facile ego, we can accept it'

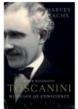


### David Fanning welcomes a newly revised guide to Soviet music:

Expanded and updated, and with many insights now sharpened up, this feels remarkably Western-facing'

#### Toscanini

Musician of Conscience By Harvey Sachs Liveright, HB, 944pp, £29.99 ISBN 978-1-631-49271-6



First a word about what this book isn't. It's not a rewrite of Harvey Sachs's *Toscanini* (1978, 1993), nor is it an

expansion of *Reflections on Toscanini* (1991), but an entirely new book that, even without footnotes and indices, tots up around 360 pages more than the previous two books put together. It is without doubt the most engaging, the best-written and certainly the most comprehensive Toscanini biography yet to be published, sympathetic without being in any sense hagiographic, and based not only on letters, documents and contemporary reportage but on over 100 hours of recorded tapes that captured the venerated maestro in conversation with his family and friends.

Anyone who has read Toscanini's letters (2002, edited by Sachs) can expect a fair smattering of amatory intrigue, much of it sexually explicit. His erotic entanglements with the sopranos Geraldine Farrar and Lotte Lehmann, with Ada Mainardi (wife of the cellist Enrico) and Elsa Pick-Mangiagalli (wife of the composer Riccardo), at times quite transcend the limits of propriety – and, more importantly, are symptomatic of a huge libido that served as fuel for some of the most incendiary orchestral performances ever to be captured on disc.

Views on Toscanini, as reported, are manifold. The Futurist poet and propagandist Marinetti compared conductors like Toscanini 'with prostitutes' vulvas [because] they adapt to various musical genres'. The politics of the day is of course a central issue, specifically the changing face of Italian Fascism (or should I say the changing face of Mussolini) alongside the gathering thunderclouds of

Nazism. Toscanini was adored at both the Bayreuth and Salzburg festivals and yet, when making a principled stand in Europe was no longer possible, he quit, never to return to Austria or Germany again. The fate of countless exiled European Jews was close to his heart and his well-known support, without fee, of what would eventually become the Israel Philharmonic makes for an inspiring read, the way he was received, his faith in the orchestra (which he reckoned had the potential to become one of the world's greatest) and his rapport with the players and the Israeli people more generally. Sachs reports all this and more with a keen sense of narrative.

Toscanini was as much a proponent of liberty as was his beloved Beethoven and he was profoundly fair-minded: when after the war a hostile gathering of major musicians signed a petition banning the conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler, who had operated in Germany during the war, from appearing in America, Toscanini was not one of the signatories. In fact he was full of praise for various Furtwängler broadcast performances, including Berlioz's Damnation of Faust. Relationships with Mahler and Willem Mengelberg, not to mention with such admiring colleagues as Busoni, Klemperer and Walter, underline what a force of nature he was. Kurt Weill heard Toscanini conduct Charpentier's opera *Louise*. 'I never knew that one could play "on" an orchestra with such freedom,' Weill said, 'with such wilful rubati. It was splendidly sung, the chorus was flabbergasting in that way it brought off its musical and dramatic tasks.' Among the many singers mentioned is the Czech tenor Leo Slezak, 'a big man, a big voice and a big personality, who had been a favourite of Mahler's'. Slezak referred to Toscanini's terrifying conscientiousness, meticulousness and authority, someone who ruthlessly demanded the utmost of everyone, a quality he shared with Mahler himself. Having successfully led the 1913 Met premiere of Mussorgsky's Boris Godunov, Toscanini began to prepare

for the American premiere of Borodin's *Prince Igor*, but difficulties with the choral parts lead to postponement and eventual abandonment.

Descriptions of his powers and prowess return, again and again, to a numinous 'something' that communicated itself to his players, a transfixing magic that is discernible, just, from the best of his recordings, the majority of which date from his years with the NBC Symphony (1937-54), a period that Sachs chronicles in great detail.

Unlike, say, Bruno Walter, Toscanini was keenly interested in jazz. The 'unexpected' in the genre appealed to him, although he considered some of it worthless. Apparently, he kept up with best of jazz 78s. Then again, a number of American composers despaired at how little interest Toscanini showed in the avant garde. Charles Ives reviled 'Toscaninny' for his conservatism, although oddly he also found his interpretations of 19th-century repertoire insufficiently Romantic. The famous Toscanini temper dominates various passages of reportage, though never with malice. There was the piano rehearsal of Beethoven's Concerto with Yehudi Menuhin as soloist (their only collaboration) when the phone suddenly rang and Toscanini ripped it out of the wall, plaster and all. Nothing could break that Zen-like concentration.

It has often been said that the rostrum tyrant's time has passed and that we're better off because of it. But are we? By offering us the unexpurgated facts of Toscanini's firebrand life and career Harvey Sachs has proved beyond doubt that when benign rage is a symptom of selfless dedication rather than pathological narcissism or facile ego, we can accept it, learn from it, even be humbled by it. Toscanini often said that he expected more of himself than of his players, and time and again in this wonderful book we sense that those who encountered him, and watched him perform, knew that to be true, and were profoundly grateful for such unstinting selflessness. Rob Cowan

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Toscanini: the subject of Harvey Sachs's wonderful new biography

## Music of the Soviet Era: 1917-1991

#### **Bv Levon Hakobian**

Second edition, Routledge, HB, 512pp, £130 ISBN 978-1-472-47108-6



For many years Boris Schwarz's *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia* (two editions, 1972 and 1983)

was the fount of wisdom on its topic. Then in 1998 came Levon Hakobian's *Music of the Soviet Age*, 1917–1987, courtesy of a little-known Swedish publishing house. Both titles were accurate: Schwarz struck an even balance between institutions and composers, while Hakobian offered more on stylistic and aesthetic trends, individuals and works. Both volumes are long since out of print.

The second edition of Hakobian's study offers far more than a slight change of title. His Introduction, for one thing, is three times as long and offers valuable new reflections on the relations of Soviet music with the West down the generations. The great strength of Hakobian's writing has always been its view from the inside (he was born in the year of Stalin's and Prokofiev's deaths and grew up with the innovations of Schnittke, Denisov,

Gubaidulina and Silvestrov in his ears) combined with wide reading in Westernlanguage scholarship and awareness of the musical world as a whole. This enables him to place Soviet composers effectively not only against one another but also alongside their Western counterparts. Expanded and updated, and with many insights now sharpened up, this synthesis of viewpoints feels remarkably Westernfacing for a survey originating from a now senior scholar in Russia.

Hakobian retains his broad three-part layout: 'Remainders of the Silver Age and the Sturm und Drang of Soviet modernism', 'Music under Stalin', and 'The year 1953 and after: the "Bronze Age". Upgrading sub-chapters to chapters, and chapters to parts, with new subheadings for key events, composers and works, makes

the structure far easier to follow than before. And much though Hakobian's own English was an idiosyncratic delight of the original, the revised text has benefited from a little help from his friends. There are still a few quaint locutions, however: such as Mahler's 'Song about the Earth'; 'Big Soviet Style' (a legitimate alternative to 'socialist realist', but 'grand' would surely convey the meaning better); and Arseny Avraamov's 'Hooter Symphony', where the more common 'Symphony of Sirens' is less inadvertantly amusing.

Hakobian continues to be outspoken in his judgements, and for all that these rest on powerful thinking, they can be startling. On the positive side, he attributes Prokofiev's problematic Stalinist works to the 'poputchik (fellow-traveller) complex', avoiding their dismissal as abjectly conformist or their equally knee-jerk embracing as crypto-dissident. Deshevov and most remarkably, given his many character flaws, Sviridov are given more sympathetic consideration than in any other Western survey. Perhaps you're interested in polystylistics, culturology, third stream and their embodiments in late-Soviet music? Or in a sympathetic exposition of the nature of 'colourlessness' (Myaskovsky's self-assessment)? Or in a table comparing the respective essences of Prokofiev and Shostakovich (page 130)? If so, this is the book for you.

Lesser-known composers are pretty well served. The sections on Butsko and Falik, for instance, are rewritten, and there are new discussions of Banshchikov and Knaifel. With his Armenian background, Hakobian even has things to say about Ghazaros Sarian, possibly the most obscure of Shostakovich's many pupils, and teacher of Tigran Mansurian, whose work is subtly compared to Takemitsu. The collector who has probed the more esoteric offerings of, say, the Russian Flowers CD label should take great pleasure in comparing reactions. Speaking for myself, where else would I find the inspiration to hunt down the symphonies of the Siberian Askold Murov (who turns out to be no less interesting than many bigger-name figures)?

There are plenty of adverse judgements, too, and their assertiveness may prompt surprise, even dissent, among some readers. Yevtushenko, for instance, is 'a very mediocre versifier' who can 'hardly be qualified an outstanding poet' (page 319); as for Shchedrin, despite a sympathetic assessment of his music, 'charm and depth are not among the strongest aspects of [his] personality' (page 325). Hakobian categorises Martynov, Desyatnikov and other post-Soviet minimalists as 'bricoleurs' (pastiche-mongers), classed below their Western counterparts, Glass and Adams, and characterised as 'too passive or lazy to undertake worthy creative tasks'. Such writing is bold if you agree, opinionated if you don't, and either refreshing or irresponsible, depending on your view of what a historical survey should be. For me, though I'm on Hakopian's side almost all the way, it's hard to forgive the dismissal of Shostakovich's major works between 1964 and 1967 as 'only too typical for Shostakovich ... only too often mak[ing] the impression of déjà entendu' (page 217).

Approaching his conclusion, Hakobian notes that 'all three surviving leaders of the rock movement of the 1980s [Andrey Makarevich, Boris Grebenshchikov and Yuriy Shevchuk], each in his own way, oppose the oppressive, adventurist and anti-cultural regime of Russia's present ruler' (page 343). With such a combination of authoritative and trenchant opinion, it's hard not to regret the termination of the book's detailed commentaries in 1991. Perhaps a third edition, sometime ...?

The whopping asking price is £130. But the publishers are already offering 20 per cent discount, and for anyone with a collector's or scholar's interest, the wisdom and provocation on offer are surely worth the price of a dozen CDs.

**David Fanning** 

## Classics RECONSIDERED





Jed Distler and
Patrick Rucker
reappraise Maurizio
Pollini's classic DG
recording of Stravinsky's
Three Movements
from Petrushka



#### Stravlnsky

Three Movements from Petrushka **Maurizio Pollini** pf

DG 🗦 (S) 447 4312

I start, I must admit, with a faint predisposition against a disc that plays for a little over 15 minutes on one side (the Three Movements from *Petrushka*) and a bare 17 on the other (Prokofiev's Piano Sonata No 7). But any reservations about quantity were immediately swept away, as soon as I began listening, by the sheer, abounding quality of Pollini's playing. I cannot think when I last heard such an exciting new piano record – not since that legendary Schumann record that was the first most of us knew of Sviatoslav Richter,

perhaps. And the excitement is produced, as then, by a combination of three things: virtuosity of the highest degree; a sense of musical purpose and commitment that is in complete control of the virtuosity; and, finally, first-rate recording ... It would have been maddening if DG had given playing like this less than their best. As it is, one can hear and admire Pollini's astonishing range of touch and colour. Both works make great demands on it, particularly the Stravinsky. When the composer transcribed sections of his ballet for pianist Arthur Rubinstein in 1921, he deliberately set about exploiting the possibilities of the instrument and even extending them. One senses his excitement, not so much at finding precise pianistic

equivalents for the orchestral sounds, as at translating these into something, as he put it himself, 'proper to the instrument'. Yet the fact remains that not all of the ideas were originally conceived for the piano, in spite of the large role that the instrument plays in *Petrushka*, and so there is a constant tension between the substance of the music and the physical form in which it is clothed. The result is instantly thrilling, though in a quite different way from the keyboard virtuosity of a Liszt or even a Prokofiev.

As for Pollini's playing, I can only say that it bears out completely the glowing reports I had heard of his recent recital at the Festival Hall. **Jeremy Noble** 6/72

Jed Distler I was a 15-year-old music student when Maurizio Pollini's recording of the Three Movements from *Petrushka* first came out on LP, coupled with Prokofiev's Seventh Sonata. I first heard it on a New York classical radio station, where the announcer dropped his usual staid demeanor and actually sounded excited about what he'd just aired. To be sure, the Stravinsky arrangement was a known factor on account of earlier recordings, yet the music seemed completely new via Pollini's unflappable poise, pinpointed detail and staggering technical finish.

Patrick Rucker Offhand, I can't think of another piano recording that made quite the splash this one did. I went to several record stores before I found a copy because it sold out as soon as it was stocked. For a long time after the release, every time I visited a pianist, there was a copy of the Boosey & Hawkes score out on the piano. Everybody was trying to figure out how Pollini did it!

But I think what made a believer out of me was Pollini's vivid take on the score. It seemed so much more imaginative, more viscerally exciting, than most conductors I'd heard. It was so easy to imagine the action of the ballet as you listened. The clarity of the recording is so impressive, don't you think?

JD Take the opening 'Russian Dance', for example, and how he balances the right hand's double notes and octaves with frighteningly consistent perspective. The brief A major section often gets sentimentalised or swamped with pedal, yet here Pollini makes the expressive contrast through shifts of colour and emphasis, without the 'traditional' slowing down. And those rapid white-note scales in the left hand that swirl up and down: what smooth legato, what evenness, yet you still hear every note.

**PR** I particularly admire the way that, following those few bars of relaxed

tempo, the energy is not only resumed but taken to a higher level of intensity. Even when Stravinsky adds right-hand decorations in the high register, Pollini's ease of delivery seems unfailing. The massive, dry, 10-voice chords that keep interrupting the texture provide a great set-up for 'Petrushka's Cell', the following movement. Throughout, the changes of mood, texture and colour are so precise and convincing. After Petrushka's furious fist-shaking, the slower tempo of the sensual music accompanying the Ballerina seems an island of serene tranquility. That all abruptly changes with the appearance of the Moor and his ensuing fight with Petrushka. But Pollini's ability to suggest strikingly vivid contrasts in quick succession is, it seems to me, the basis of this movement's power.

JD I agree, although in this movement I actually find Yuja Wang's more recent DG interpretation more playful, even if the myriad tempo changes are less adroitly

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negotiated. It's the extra lilt to her grace notes in the *Andantino* that convinces me. And also in this movement, the live Rubinstein recording unearthed from his Carnegie Hall series (last available as part of RCA's 'Arthur Rubinstein – The Complete Album Collection'), though admittedly flawed and textually cavalier at times, also conveys more tonal warmth and narrative fantasy to my ears.

In the 'Shrovetide Fair' finale, Pollini certainly raised the proverbial bar for clarity and exactitude in comparison to previous recorded versions. You can tell right away why most conservatory students and competition hopefuls in the 20th century's last three decades wanted to be Pollini. Yet consider Yuja Wang again. For example, most pianists bang out the first 16 bars, even though Stravinsky doesn't indicate any dynamic marking until the *forte* in bar 17. Yuja Wang, by contrast, plays softly, which not only gives the music a place from which to build, but also allows her to realise the composer's *sempre legatissimo* directive in

the right-hand double thirds and octaves. I also appreciate how she invests the cross rhythms in the accordion-like chords with greater melodic shape compared to Pollini, whose articulation overall is relatively steel-edged.

PR You and I are both admirers of Yuja Wang and, I have a sneaking suspicion, of Rubinstein, for whom, after all, Stravinsky wrote the piece. And we're surely of one mind in the belief that there can be a number of successful approaches to music of this quality. I'm eagerly susceptible to Wang's reading of the suite. It's less coolly objective in the Apollonian sense and, ultimately, probably a good deal subtler than Pollini's. Another interesting interpretation is Francesco Tristano Schlimé's live performance, recorded during the 2009 Ruhr Festival (Avi-Music). This combines febrile strength with a wealth of detail. On the other hand, I'm not completely convinced by Daniil Trifonov. I know his Carnegie

Hall performance of December 7, 2016, although only from video, but it seems to me that he indulges in a good deal of lavish rubato which isn't consistent with Stravinsky's astringent anti-Romanticism.

But I'm straying from Pollini. You mention his steel-edged articulation, which is, I think, an excellent description. Nevertheless, there's something about those hard edges and clean lines, that tightly wound rhythmic vitality, which still strikes me, all these years later, as being particularly apt for Stravinsky. It's not an approach easily applied elsewhere, even to other early 20th-century repertory. And as you suggest, younger pianists who attempted to duplicate this very exacting, in-your-face kind of playing – and there were plenty of them – ended up beating the daylights out of their instrument without achieving the desired musical results. But the fact that so many musicians wanted to imitate Pollini's inimitable approach speaks to the widespread influence this recording had. 6

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# PHOTOGRAPHY: ERICH AUERBACH/GETTY IMAGES

## THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

## The instrumental romance

Scouring the repertoire for stand-alone works, **David Gutman** sets out to find out how far composers have ventured outside the comfort zone of a form that is now far removed from its medieval Spanish vocal origins

he term 'romance', 'romanza' or 'Romanze' has come to denote varieties of compositional endeavour unrecognisable to the balladeers responsible for the earliest examples of the genre. Its medieval Spanish prototype, a narrative folk ballad for courtly performance, only later acquired a refrain and an accompaniment. Ironically, the most ubiquitous of Spanish romances today is a guitar piece of indeterminate origin popularised by Narcisco Yepes in René Clément's 1952 film *Jeux interdits*.

When the vocal romance arrived in mid-18th-century France it was associated with sentimental drawing-room fare. In 19thcentury Italy it was attached to short arias within substantial tragedies before operatic verismo changed everything. The designation appeared frequently in Germany and lasted longest in Russia, where Shostakovich had his own cinematic earworm extracted from his score for *The Gadfly* (1955); his vocal romances could be loftier.

The instrumental romance, a term initially applied to slow movements with

a songlike theme, began infiltrating large-scale abstract composition from the 1760s. Gossec's Symphony in E flat, Op 5 No 2 (c1761-2), is credited with the first such labelling of a simple ternary structure. In Haydn's Symphony No 85 in B flat, *La reine*, the tag attaches to a set of variations. Mozart's Piano Concerto in D minor, K466, includes a disturbed rondo-reverie Romance in five parts. Chopin used the term for the slow movement of his Piano Concerto in E minor as, later, did Sir William Sterndale Bennett

in his Symphony in G minor, Op 43. Schumann eagerly exploited the name, while Vaughan Williams appended 'romance' or 'romanza' to significant statements throughout his career, including *The Lark Ascending* and the Fifth Symphony's third movement.

Reluctantly, I've prioritised freestanding entities that place 'romance' on the title page. With no common pattern save poetic connotations of love and a vaguely antiquarian nostalgia, the romance would seem to promise sympathetic listeners a safe haven of simplicity and warmth. But I wanted to see how far composers might depart from those tender aesthetic implications. 6



The sweet-toned Arthur Grumiaux explored the violin romance, with Beethoven's pair a top recommendation

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#### *Dvořák* **Romance in F minor, Op 11** Josef Suk *vn* Czech PO / Karel Ančerl

Supraphon (5/62)

That so many 19th-century romances feature a solo violin is down to the lingering influence of compositions by Pierre Gaviniès (1728-1800) and a subsequent gaggle of Paris-based virtuosos. Dvořák's Romance (1873-77) has different roots. Predating his own Violin Concerto, it's an evocative revamp of part of his F minor String Quartet. No exponent is more relaxed nor more sweetly eloquent than Josef Suk, the composer's great-grandson, cavernously recorded in 1960.



#### Glière, arr Derzhanovsky Romance in D, Op 3 David Oistrakh vn Russian State SO / Kirill Kondrashin

Glière was most affectionately remembered by the Russian composers he tutored. His Romance (1902), an early work for violin and piano which might be dismissed as a formulaic trifle but for the present recording, is raised to another level not so much by the orchestration prepared by another member of Prokofiev and Myaskovsky's circle as by the commanding advocacy of David Oistrakh. Never mind the mono sound: the intonation is flawless, the tone unfathomably gorgeous.



## Sibelius Romance in C, Op 42 Bergen PO / Edward Gardner Chandos (2/17)

Sibelius wrote this discreetly

yearning number for strings in 1904, while struggling with his Violin Concerto. In three sections like many such genre pieces, it recalls the more comfortable idiom of Tchaikovsky and Grieg and, significantly, there's no solo violin part. Edward Gardner is unique in placing the score in the context of thematically related Sibelius songs, reconnecting the concept of the romance with its vocal roots, even if the work itself was originally entitled Andante.



## Elgar Romance in D minor, Op 62 Graham Salvage bn Hallé Orch / Sir Mark Elder Hallé (6/04)

This piece (1910) is little known, not just because of its modest dimensions but perhaps also because the bassoon is usually associated more with humorous fare than with affecting contemplation. Graham Salvage is an eloquent soloist, and Sir Mark Elder and the Hallé (not untypically) take their time, allowing deeper currents to emerge. The wistful, oddly provisional mood – like certain thematic elements – is reminiscent of the composer's contemporaneous Violin Concerto.



## Bruch Romanze in F, Op 85 Yuri Bashmet *va*LSO / Neeme Järvi RCA (3/99)

The last of Bruch's romances, this gently defiant display of musical conservatism was probably a preparatory exercise for his Op 88 Concerto for clarinet and viola, also written in 1911. It combines the melodic inspiration of past hits with the serene implications of the title, and shares the key of F with violin romances by Beethoven and Dvořák (for all that the latter is in the minor). Yuri Bashmet is an expressive advocate.



## Vaughan Williams Romance in D flat Tommy Reilly harmonica ASMF / Sir Neville Marriner Decca/Chandos (2/77)

Vaughan Williams added a romance to his otherwise uncharacteristic Serenade in A minor (1898) and was still deploying the label at the heart of his Tuba Concerto more than 50 years on (1954). Following initial success, his self-sufficient concertante work (1951) for American harmonica virtuoso Larry Adler has rather slipped from view. Tommy Reilly's instrument is less closely miked than Adler's, hence thinner-sounding, letting through more capricious instrumental detail.



## Goehr Romanza, Op 24 Moray Welsh vc RLPO / David Atherton NMC (1/83)

Writing in 1968 for a soloist (Jacqueline du Pré) not renowned for modernist sympathies, and observing that 'the more conventional concerto form...poses special well-nigh insoluble problems for the composer of our time', Alexander Goehr opted for a 24-minute Romanza that begins with a 26-bar melody. Which isn't to say that its brooding lyricism makes for easy listening. This is a fine studio recording by Welsh, but aficionados will crave the bootleg of du Pré's premiere (Intaglio).



#### Holloway Romanza, Op 31 Erich Gruenberg vn City of London Sinfonia / Richard Hickox

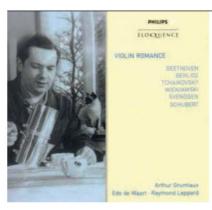
Chandos (9/94)

A pupil of Goehr, Robin Holloway has written similarly titled *concertante* works. First to emerge was this iridescent piece for violin and small orchestra (1976) – four interlinked movements in a single span which surfaced during work on his opera *Clarissa*. At once mellifluous and astringent, it is prematurely postmodern, though with a more discriminating approach to fusing old and new than is usually associated with that aesthetic.



## Picker Romances and Interludes Robert Atherholt ob Houston SO / Christoph Eschenbach Erato (7/91)

A neo-romantic in the Holloway mould and a fellow admirer of Schumann, New Yorker Tobias Picker has a neurological disorder which might or might not colour the nature of his creativity. In this work (1989) he embeds fleshed-out versions of Schumann's *Drei Romanzen*, Op 94 (the only significant work for oboe and piano by a major Romantic), within a larger, darker frame of his own devising. The blocks remain stylistically distinct over the 26-minute duration.



#### Beethoven

#### Romances - No 1 in G, Op 40; No 2 in F, Op 50 Arthur Grumiaux vn New Philh / Edo de Waart Australian Eloquence (11/71<sup>R</sup>)

Beethoven left an unfinished *Romance cantabile* and vir (1786/87; for flute, bassoon, piano and orchestra), restrict but his two romances for violin and orchestra formed

(published out of sequence - Op 40 dated 1802; Op 50, 1798) served as a model for subsequent composers. More influential than the unaccompanied opening of Op 40 or their shared rondo form was the exquisite balance of lyricism and virtuosity. Ubiquitous in the 78rpm era of restricted playing time, one or other or both formed a natural makeweight for the Violin Concerto on LP and CD. Sometimes they headlined soloist-led albums of *morceaux de concert*. One such, artless rather than intensely personalised and including items unfairly excluded above, such as Svendsen's Op 26, is Grumiaux's 1970 anthology.

## THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

## Dohnányi's Variations on a Nursery Song

**Jeremy Nicholas** listens to the available recordings of an 'unfashionable' gem – a work for orchestra and solo piano which cries out for an uninhibited, fun approach from its performers

ow many of us, I wonder, were encouraged as youngsters to explore the world of classical music after hearing this piece? There is the ominous, daunting Introduction, full of foreboding and menace. The sound builds thrillingly to a massive climax before dying slowly away to nothing. Pause. Silence. Then one explosive, deafening chord that makes you jump out of your skin. Silence again. Then? 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star' in C major. Classical music, so often solemn and self-reverential, can also amuse. It can make you smile.

Beneath the score's portentous title - Variations on a Nursery Song for Full Orchestra and Piano Concertante, Op 25 - the composer informs us that he has written the piece 'for the enjoyment of humorous people and for the annoyance of others'. During his lifetime (1877-1960) it was a popular favourite (between 1923 and 1959 it was played 24 times at the BBC Proms; since then it has been heard just twice, in 1987 and 1993). These days, it has fallen thoroughly out of fashion and Ernő Dohnányi himself has become something of a peripheral figure, suffering in comparison with his Hungarian contemporaries Kodály and Bartók. It is significant that he adopted the German form of his name, Ernst von (with the additional 'von' implying nobility), for though he became known as the Grand Old Man of Hungarian music, Dohnányi's musical idiom is in the conservative late-Romantic German tradition, unlike that of his two compatriots.

When he completed the Variations in 1914, Dohnányi was 36. He was acknowledged as the greatest Hungarian pianist and composer since Liszt, was a professor at the prestigious Berlin Hochschule für Musik and, though married, was in the throes of an affair with the wife of the celebrated violinist Bronisław Huberman (he would eventually marry her in 1919). That's the background. The eponymous nursery song is 'Ah! Vous dirai-je, maman' (1761, lyrics added 1774), also known as 'The Alphabet Song' in America (1834), 'Morgen kommt der Weihnachtsmann' (a German Christmas song) and 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star' (1838).

#### THE PIECE OUTLINED

The following is a route map of Dohnányi's Variations, which consists of Introduction, Theme, 12 Variations and a coda, all played without a break.

Introduction – *Maestoso*: Donald Tovey described it as a 'symphony in Woe minor' with its Wagnerian pomposity and Mahlerian trumpet calls. As early as bar 14 the theme is heard in disguised form played in plodding crotchets by the horns.

Theme – *Allegro*: the piano plays the theme straight – well, almost straight – accompanied by pizzicato strings and, in the final four bars, bassoon.

Variation 1 – *Poco più mosso*: the piano gallops along in *staccato e leggiero* triplets with a light string accompaniment (violins playing a telescoped version of the theme).



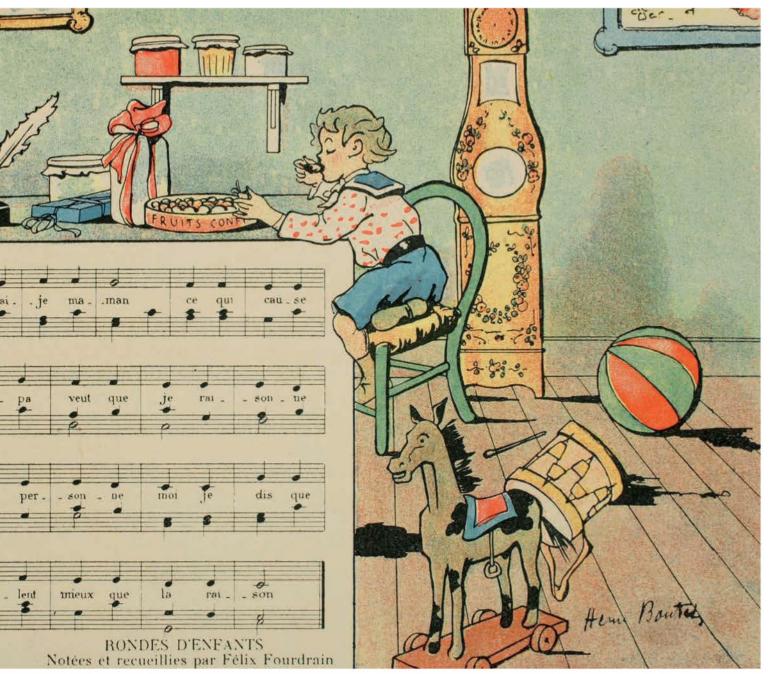
Var 2 – *Risoluto*: using the theme, the horns play question and answer with the soloist and woodwind.

Var 3: this variation is in the style of Brahms and quotes phrases from his Second Piano Concerto.

Var 4 – *Molto meno mosso (Allegretto moderato*): two bassoons and contrabassoon play a variation of the theme, in a humorous dialogue with the piano and commented upon by the two flutes and piccolo.

Var 5– *Più mosso*: the piano is instructed to play 'somewhat blurred with a lot of pedal, like a musical box'; the effect is enhanced by a glockenspiel playing the theme and a prominent part for the harp.

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An antique bookplate featuring 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star' - Dohnányi's chosen nursery song

Var 6 – Ancora più mosso (Allegro): Tovey called this 'an étude for pianoforte and wind instruments without parallel in classical or modern orchestration'. Reminiscent of Saint-Saëns, it's a hectic dialogue between piano and woodwind ending with an upward glissando from the soloist.

Var 7 – Waltz (*Tempo giusto*): a parody of a Viennese waltz seasoned with a sprinkling of Richard Strauss and Tchaikovsky.

Var 8 – *Alla marcia* (*Allegro moderato*): the timpani (latterly replaced by cellos and basses) provide a persistent rhythm throughout this minor-key march.

Var 9 – *Presto*: The 'Sorcerer's Apprentice' variation – a sinister scherzo in 3/8 time with prominent roles for bassoon, xylophone and contrabassoon, the piano entering only halfway through.

Var 10 – Passacaglia (*Adagio non troppo*): this is the longest variation and also the heart of the work, with the theme becoming the continuing bass of a noble passacaglia. There are passing references to Brahms's Fourth Symphony and echoes of the solemn Introduction leading, after a crushing crescendo, to...

Var 11 – Choral (*Maestoso*): the theme transformed into a magnificent Brahmsian chorale that subsides into some knowing Debussian whole-tone contributions from the piano, celeste and harp.

Var 12 – Finale fugato (Allegro vivace): after a playful fugato treatment of the theme bouncing between one group and another, some spectacular pages of pianistic virtuosity, and a possible quote from Reznicek's *Donna Diana* Overture, the opening two-finger version of the theme is heard once again. This time it leads to the coda (*Molto allegro*) and a final insouciant dash to the finishing line.

#### **COMPOSER AS SOLOIST**

At the head of any survey of this work must come the two recordings made by **Ernő Dohnányi** himself. The first of these was made in February 1931 with the LSO.



Conductor Lawrance Collingwood (left) and Dohnányi (right; 1920s) made a recording in 1931

The first choice conductor of HMV's Artistic Director Fred Gaisberg had been Sir Landon Ronald, but the project was passed to Sir Malcolm Sargent; a change in dates for the session brought in Lawrance Collingwood. Dohnányi's masterly scoring suffers from an inevitable loss of detail and colour in the elderly sound picture, most notably the ravishing piano writing in the Passacaglia. String intonation and ensemble in the first three variations is by no means perfect; thereafter, things improve. But the performance is electrifying. One can only marvel at Dohnányi's deft and varied touch, the nonchalant bravura and the easy-going charm he brings to proceedings.

In his second recording (June 1956, at the age of 78), Dohnányi is less incisive and nimble. The glitter has gone. (There is film of him – available on YouTube – shot at about this time playing a short excerpt from the Variations.) Sir Thomas Beecham had been producer David Bicknell's preferred conductor but couldn't be pinned down and so Sir Adrian Boult was hired with the RPO, from whom he draws a splendid response (woodwind in particular). The sound is warm, the balance is realistic (similar to

#### DOHNÁNYI PLAYS DOHNÁNYI

#### Dohnányi pf LSO / Collingwood

EMI mono (\$) (22 discs) 217575-2

The sound quality and dynamic range are remarkably good for 1931. Dohnányi's playing



is more precise and agile than on his later recording. He and Collingwood simply 'get' the piece: with a straight face, a knowing wink and the right pace (21'43").

a typical Mercury recording from the same era), but as a performance it doesn't match the composer's premiere recording.

Boult had conducted an earlier account in 1954 with Julius Katchen and the LPO. The same team met up again five years later in the same location (Kingsway Hall, London) for a stereo remake of the same coupling of the Dohnányi and Rachmaninov's Paganini Rhapsody. Both versions have been long-revered, reissued many times on LP and CD, one or other of them always keeping their place in the catalogue. But there is little charm or wit on offer in either. In the 1954 recording, Katchen, placed well to the fore, is keen to persuade us that this is a showy virtuoso vehicle. The horns in the Introduction are too backwardly placed to make an impact (as is the tuba). And in Var 5, instead of a glockenspiel

#### **BEST OF HUNGARY**

### **Kocsis** *pf* **Budapest Fest Orch / I Fischer** Hungaroton © HCD31362

The pan-European musical language parodied with such élan in this piece is vividly



captured here. Most importantly, soloist, orchestra and conductor are at one in conveying that feeling of debonair insouciance inherent in the work's 'subtitle'.

there are tubular bells (unaccountably, several conductors opt for this).

Katchen's theme in the 1959 remake, enervating in 1954 (well below *allegro*), is now perkier (0'54" as opposed to 1'00"). Orchestral textures are clearer and more transparent; the glockenspiel sounds like a glockenspiel; and everything is done with a lighter touch – try the Brahms variation (Var 3) and the Waltz (Var 7) – making it altogether preferable to the earlier account. But though undoubtedly an old favourite, it has now been surpassed.

#### **COMPOSER CONNECTIONS**

Three other recordings of the work have direct links to the composer. The first is from Earl Wild and the New Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by the composer's grandson Christoph von Dohnányi,

#### **BARGAIN VERSION**

#### Nebolsin pf Buffalo PO / Falletta

Naxos M 8 572303

The piano is a little too forward and the gaps between variations are too long, but



featuring as it does one of the most dynamic and sparkling soloists in the *Variations* and including two other Dohnányi works, this is a disc to be reckoned with.



Sir Malcolm Sargent (left) and pianist Cyril Smith (right) made two recordings together

recorded for Reader's Digest in London in 1967 and last seen on the Chesky label (nla). It's a great pity that it's not available, as this incomparably mischievous, impudent reading would be my overall top choice and is the nearest anyone has come to a perfect realisation of the score – a super-refined version of Dohnányi's 1931 account and in infinitely better sound, of course. It features the best musical box of all (Var 5 with – almost uniquely – both harp and glockenspiel parts audible) and, supremely, Wild's suave and assured dispatch of the solo part.

Another is from **Béla Siki** (still with us at the age of 94), who studied with Dohnányi in Budapest. His 1976 recording with the Seattle Symphony under Milton Katims is full of character and deft touches. Sadly, too much detail is lost because of the piano's forward placement, but as an opportunity to hear the piano part isolated from the orchestra, it stands as a unique document. There is a bad edit at 6'58".

A second Budapest student of the composer leads the Chicago Symphony Orchestra with his compatriot **András Schiff** as soloist. Sir Georg Solti brings to the score terrific accuracy and attention to detail with a welcome and appropriate transparency. Schiff, too, brings a playful light touch to his role, a true *concertante* rather than concerto reading in which he

resolutely refuses to play the virtuoso card. That is one reason why the whole thing fails to excite, charm and engage. Even the aurally immense climax to the Passacaglia fails to thrill.

Several distinguished compatriots of Dohnányi have entered the lists, foremost among them the late lamented **Zoltán Kocsis** with the Budapest Festival Orchestra under Iván Fischer. The performance boasts impressive pianistic finesse (Kocsis takes the final fugato at a terrific lick) and a first-rate, well-recorded orchestral contribution.

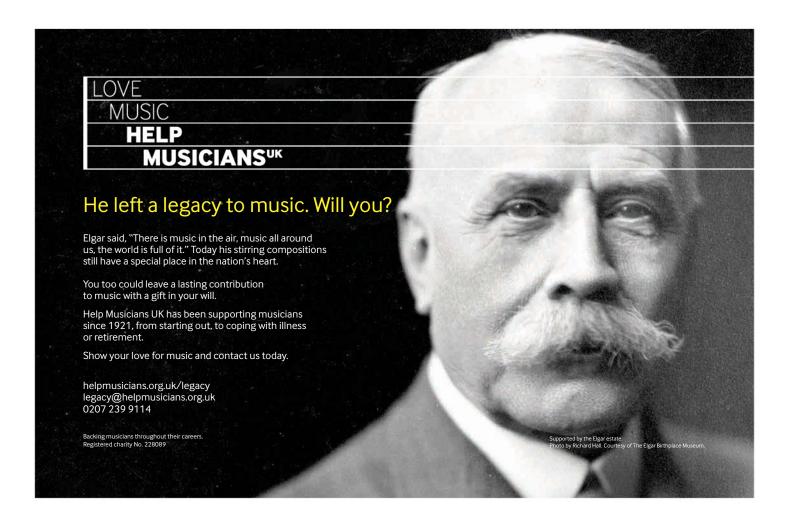
What it lacks in cheek and charm it makes up with precision and transparency.

#### A MIXED BAG - AND A CLEAR WINNER

The version recorded in 1944 in Liverpool's Philharmonic Hall by **Cyril Smith** and the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra under Sargent (Columbia, 4/44 – nla) is both witty and whimsical. The piece had been in Smith's repertoire since 1930, and experience shows. Sargent's accompaniment is superb, and overall there is a fondness, familiarity and fun about the whole enterprise. It's a shame that APR's excellent transfer is not currently available, especially as it outclasses the remake by the same soloist and conductor (this time with the Philharmonia) made in 1953. This performance retains the spirit of the earlier version, but acceptable 78rpm surface swish has been exchanged for the acoustic of an empty church. Everything

### **SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY**

| RECO  | RDING DATE / ARTISTS                     | RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)   |  |  |
|-------|--|--|--|--|
| 1931  | Dohnányi LSO / Collingwood               | EMI (\$) (22 discs) 217575-2 (6/32 <sup>R</sup> ; 1/92 <sup>R</sup> )        |  |  |
| 1952  | Jacquinot Philh Orch / Fistoulari        | Naxos (M) NSO781 (10/54 <sup>R</sup> )                                       |  |  |
| 1953  | C Smith Philh Orch / Sargent             | Guild ® GHCD2420 (3/54 <sup>R</sup> )  |  |  |
| 1954  | Katchen LPO / Boult                      | Decca (\$) (36 discs) 483 0356 (9/54 <sup>R</sup> )                          |  |  |
| 1956  | <b>Aller</b> Concert Arts SO / F Slatkin | BnF Collection ⑤ → (9/58 <sup>R</sup> )                                      |  |  |
| 1956  | Dohnányi RPO / Boult                     | Praga Digitals (F) 🥮 DSD250 231 (10/57 <sup>R</sup> , 1/90 <sup>R</sup> )    |  |  |
| 1956  | Schiff Chicago SO / Solti                | Decca Eloquence 🕅 ELQ476 7671 (10/86 <sup>R</sup> )                          |  |  |
| 1959  | Katchen LPO / Boult                      | Decca (\$) (2) → 458 361-2DF2; (\$) (36 discs) 483 0356 (7/60 <sup>a</sup> ) |  |  |
| c1975 | Ortiz New Philh Orch / Koizumi           | EMI/Warner Classics   ②   → 264319-2 (6/76 <sup>R</sup> )                    |  |  |
| 1976  | <b>Siki</b> Seattle Sym / Katims         | Brilliant Classics (\$) (40 discs) 95300 (2/77 <sup>R</sup> )                |  |  |
| 1980  | Lantos Budapest SO / Lehel               | Hungaroton (M) 🕞 HRC121 (11/80 <sup>₽</sup> )                                |  |  |
| 1989  | Kocsis Budapest Fest Orch / I Fischer    | Hungaroton (P) HCD31362; Philips (F) 446 472-2PH (1/90°, 4/96);              |  |  |
| 1994  | Anderson Hungarian St SO / A Fischer     | Nimbus (F) NI5349 (3/95)   |  |  |
| 1998  | Shelley BBC PO / Bamert                  | Chandos (F) CHAN9733 (9/99); (B) (S) CHAN10906                               |  |  |
| 2009  | Nebolsin Buffalo PO / Falletta           | Naxos M 8 572303   |  |  |
| 2013  | Tryon RPO / Van Steen                    | Somm (F) COMMCD253 (10/14)   |  |  |





## BRILLIANT CLASSICS

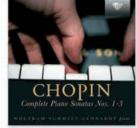
Just some of the superb releases for Summer 2017





#### HANDEL IN ITALY

Cantatas, Arias and Serenata 14 CD-Box 95496BR



1CD 95209BR



2CD 95447BR



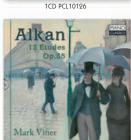
1CD



3CD 95103BI



1CD 95492BF



1CD PCL10127











seems distantly placed, reducing clarity and impact.

Another front-runner comes from Victor Aller (1905-77) with the Concert Arts Symphony Orchestra conducted by his brother-in-law Felix Slatkin. Aller makes a delightful companion and there is something of a convivial family gathering about this account. 'Let's have fun' seems to be the watchword (the woodwind in particular are given their head, but not at the expense of ensemble balance). Every subtle touch of Dohnányi's part writing is made without point-making, Slatkin manufacturing a swooning string sound that marries his Hollywood experience with his Russian-Jewish heritage. The sound quality is more than acceptable given that it was recorded more than 60 years ago.

Valerie Tryon's 2013 recording is unique in programming the Variations with Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No 1 and (most aptly) Richard Strauss's *Burleske*. She is partnered by the RPO and Jac van Steen, and the disc is very well recorded (engineered by Tony Wass in Henry Wood Hall, London). The Variations receives an honest, workmanlike account that (with a duration of 25'57") speaks of the steady

tempos adopted throughout and which, in the end, fails to set the pulse racing.

JoAnn Falletta leads off with an overcooked Introduction (4'01"), but any fears of a too-earnest reading are dispelled with an electrifying 'jump' chord and the entrance of **Eldar Nebolsin**, whose exuberant and polished playing is matched every step of the way by Falletta. The climax to the Passacaglia is beautifully judged as is the subsequent release of tension in the chorale. You get the feeling that everyone had a high old time during the sessions (Buffalo, NY, in 2009).

I had never before heard **Cristina Ortiz**'s account with the New Philharmonia Orchestra under Kazuhiro Koizumi and had no great hopes for it after reading somewhere that 'Ortiz could sue Koizumi for the lack of support she gets' in this recording released in 1976. It's a criticism I cannot understand. The orchestral accompaniment is among the finest. But everybody takes it all just a tad too seriously – it's a little ponderous.



Howard Shelley offers joie de vivre and a wonderful range of colour

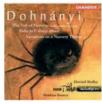
(There is a sprightlier account from Ortiz on YouTube, conducted by André Previn.)

The 1980 recording from **István Lantos**, the Budapest Symphony Orchestra and György Lehel is unfairly underrated. These are hardly star names, but they provide a highly engaging account coupled with Dohnányi's rarely heard *Ruralia hungarica*, Op 32b. True, the sound is a bit lemony, the piano's tone not entirely ingratiating and its sound too forwardly placed (it rather

#### TOP CHOICE

**Shelley** *pf* **BBC Philharmonic / Bamert** Chandos **(E)** CHAN9733

Shelley veers with ease between light-handed virtuoso and *concertante* chamber musician,



and Dohnányi's masterly scoring is revealed more consistently and in more detail than in almost all rival accounts. The sound engineering is excellent. spoils the contrabassoon and bassoons' contribution to Var 4). But with what clarity you hear the brass and string writing, what verve and swagger they bring to the Waltz (Var 7) and the *Presto* (Var 9). And unlike Schiff, Lantos does not hold back on the obviously virtuosic passages of the solo part.

Mark Anderson quickly disappeared from view after a string of recordings for Nimbus after coming third in the 1993 Leeds International Piano Competition. Neat and nimble he may be, but the work needs a more assertive and characterful execution. Although admirably supported by the Hungarian State Symphony Orchestra and Ádám Fischer, the woodwind are too backwardly placed, and detail is often generalised.

Fabienne Jacquinot, a pupil of Yves Nat who toured widely in the 1940s, made a series of discs with Anatole Fistoulari in the 1950s. Unfortunately, her Dohnányi Variations is not among the best of them. Some splashy moments, a clunking musical box variation and an inability to observe any pp markings render her hors de combat. Fistoulari, however, is one of the few conductors to mark the pause between

Variations 3 and 4 (the only time this is requested between any of the variations).

The clear winner in state-of-the-art sound has to be Howard Shellev with Matthias Bamert. Here is a soloist who matches the joie de vivre of Wild with a variety of touch, tone and colour that few others manage. Listen to such details as the violins' exposed high espressivo A flats, F sharps and G naturals in the Introduction. These produce some wayward intonation and imprecise ensemble in many other accounts. Not here. In the Waltz, Bamert highlights with rare lucidity Dohnányi's artfully hidden hemiola statement of the theme on violins then violas: the cat and mouse with the woodwind in Var 6 is superbly executed; and the climax to the Passacaglia is unquestionably the most spine-tingling on disc. It's not all perfect: the violas' off-beats at the end of the Introduction are not there and Shelley's upward glissando in the final bar of the work is inaudible. Hardly sufficient grounds, though, to knock it off the top spot. G

## PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Presenting live concert and opera performances from around the world, and reviews of archived music-making available online to stream when you want, where you want

#### **Gstaad, Switzerland & online**

Gstaad Digital Festival, July 13 - September 2

The Gstaad Menuhin Festival was founded by Yehudi Menuhin in 1957, and these days it's a many-stranded and star-studded affair with concerts taking place in the picturesque ancient churches and chapels in Gstaad and the surrounding villages. This year's festival is themed 'Pomp in Music', and the major new development for 2017 is the Gstaad Digital Festival, a new web platform which will offer selected concerts for replay, and via live stream, pre-concert content, and also live reviews from prominent music critics. It will then be regularly updated with new content throughout the year. It's also available as an app on the Swisscom TV website. Artists performing this month at the festival include the violinists Isabelle Faust and Anne-Sophie Mutter, and the pianist Piotr Anderszewski.

gstaaddigitalfestival.ch

#### Festival de Radio France Occitanie Montpelier & Radio France

Pianist Lukas Geniušas performs Rachmaninov, Prokofiev & Zaderatsky, July 20 Running from July 10 to 28, the multi-arts

Festival de Radio France Occitanie Montpelier is not only one of the biggest festivals in the south of France, featuring some of the biggest soloists and orchestras along with the cream of the rising generations, but it's also exceptionally accessible. Not only is every concert broadcast on Radio France Musique and accessible through the EBU (European Broadcasting Union), but a substantial number of high-quality classical concerts are free. We're highlighting a piano recital from a pianist not yet widely known in the UK, the Russian-Lithuanian Lukas Geniušas, who won the silver prizes in the 2010 Chopin Competition and the 2015 Tchaikovsky Competition. His all-Russian programme features Rachmaninov's Preludes, Prokofiev's Sonatas Nos 2 and 5 and Zaderatsky's Preludes and Fugues.

lefestival.eu, francemusique.fr

#### Beaune, France & Radio France Musique

Mitridate & Tancredi at the Festival International d'Opéra Baroque et Romantique de Beaune, July 21 and 22

The ancient walled town of Beaune in France's Burgundy region is the picturesque setting for this opera festival running between July 7

and 30, and as with many French festivals it's a place to hear artists who are seen slightly less on British and US shores. Two of the festival's weekend operas are set to be recorded by Radio France Music. First, on July 21, Thibault Noally conducts the Orchestre Les Accents in Alessandro Scarlatti's *Mitridate* in the Basilique Notre Dame. Then the outdoor stage in the courtyard of the Cour des Hospices is the scene for Rossini's *Tancredi* on July 22 with Ottavio Dantone conducting the Choir of Namur and his orchestra Accademia Bizantina.

festivalbeaune.com, francemusique.fr

#### Combins church, Verbier & medici.tv

## Charles Dutoit conducts Richard Strauss's Elektra, July 21 - August 6

The Alpine Verbier Festival mixes masterclasses with an exceptionally rich programme of world-class chamber and symphonic performances. This year's festival runs from July 21 to August 6, and the vast majority of performances are streamed on medici.tv. One of the major events this year is Charles Dutoit conducting a concert performance of Strauss's *Salomé* with a cast headed up by Gun-Brit Barkmin (July 21).

#### ONLINE DANCE REVIEW

#### A staged performance of Haydn's The Creation, blending the oratorio with modern dance

Haydn

Haydn's radiant oratorio *The Creation* depicts the Book of Genesis and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Adding dance might seem like an inspired idea. However, this collaboration between Garsington Opera and Rambert, commissioned for the dance company's 90th anniversary, emerges as an odd hybrid.

Mark Baldwin's choreography draws fluid lines across the stage in front of Pablo

Bronstein's Gothic altar screen, behind which the Rambert Orchestra and BBC Singers are conveniently tucked away, crisply conducted by Paul Hoskins. The three excellent vocal soloists take turns to appear in the two arches either side



Haydn - THE CREATION

of the conductor, like figures in a Swiss weather clock. At least being filmed during its short run at Sadler's Wells ensures that the performance can begin in the necessary darkness denied it at Garsington's glasspanelled opera house.

Members of the professional Rambert company are in grey, bedecked with white pom-poms like Pierrot figures, while the larger ensemble from the Rambert School are dressed in black leotards with courtly Tudor ruffs. Baldwin's choreography is often attractive to watch but is perversely at odds with what Haydn is telling us. When Sarah Tynan sings Gabriel's 'On mighty pens uplifted soars the eagle aloft', a solo

dancer writhes on the floor. This lack of narrative interpretation contributes to a disappointing experience.

#### Mark Pullinger

Available to view for free (until October 15) at the operaplatform.eu

110 GRAMOPHONE AUGUST 2017 gramophone.co.uk

#### ONLINE CONCERT REVIEW

#### Amsterdam's great Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra invites you to join them 'at home'

#### Strauss in Amsterdam

The Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra has a fast-growing video library of recent performances. For now there's no paywall, but the production values – unfussy multi-camera filming, clear menus and extra documentary material – stand comparison with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra's Digital Concert Hall.

Highlights for some will be the commercially issued, portmanteau Mahler cycle (4/13) and the nine Beethoven symphonies with Iván Fischer. However, it is sometimes forgotten that in the early years of the last century, Richard Strauss, no less than Mahler, enjoyed a fruitful relationship with both the orchestra and Willem Mengelberg. His successor-but-one Bernard Haitink conducts a supple but sombre *Four Last Songs*, with Anja Harteros a lofty, untroubled soloist (no encoded subtitles;

We also recommend the August 1 recital with former *Gramophone* Artist of the Year, the violinist Leonidas Kavakos, and former Young Artist, the pianist Yuja Wang. Medici isn't just broadcasting concerts either; there will also be selected live rehearsals, including on July 22 the festival's Music Director Gábor Takács-Nagy conducting the festival chamber orchestra in a programme to include Brahms's Piano Concerto No 1 with Sir András Schiff.

verbierfestival.com, medici.tv

#### Prinzregententheater, Munich & online

### Munich Opera Festival presents Weber's Oberon, July 30

Weber's 1826 opera *Oberon*, deliciously described on the Bavarian State Opera's website as a 'romantic elfin opera in three acts' doesn't get many stage outings. It also has one of the more unusual plotlines, dealing with how the help of humans has to be enlisted when Oberon and Titania quarrel, so this new production from Nikolaus Habjan, which is free to view online via staatsoper.tv. is well worth looking up. Ivor Bolton - another draw, given he's less frequently onstage in the British isles at the moment - conducts a top young cast headed up by Julian Prégardian as Oberon and Alyona Abramova as Puck, along with Brenden Gunnell, Anne El-Khashem, Annette Dasch, Rachael Wilson and Johannes Kammler.

staatsoper.de



for such a performance, the words are beside the point).

A notable pair of Latvians takes care of the rest. The noble and calculated restraint of Mariss Jansons in *Tod und Verklärung* is complemented and much enhanced by a documentary featuring the late Michael Kennedy, the orchestra's principal oboe (Alexei Ogrintchouk, in English) and the longstanding, superb principal flute, Emily Beynon (making her contributions in Dutch). Now accompanied by Andris

Nelsons, Ogrintchouk returns as a refined soloist in the Oboe Concerto, with an option of his overlaid spoken commentary, full of insight and anecdote.

Two Also sprach
Zarathustras offer arresting
points of comparison
between pupil and
teacher. Nelsons draws the
piece in long and sweeping
lines: a species of his

Wagner conducting is at work here. I am drawn more to Jansons's much weightier, metaphysically imposing vision, which lends utter conviction to Nietzsche's piously deluded 'backwoods people' as much as his joyfully waltzing new breed of men. With the prospect of Nelsons's *Macbeth*, Jansons's *Heldenleben* and more, there is every incentive to see for yourself.

Peter Quantrill

Available to view for free at concertgebouworkest.nl/en/video

### Angelika Kauffmann Saal, Schwarzenberg, Austria & ORF

#### Baiba Skride, Sol Gabetta & Nelson Goerner perform Schubert and Chopin, August 25, broadcast August 29

While music festivals tend to specialise in beautiful concert settings, few are capable of topping the Schubertiade's principal venue, the Angelika Kauffmann Saal, an all-timber 600-seater chamber hall set amid Alpine pastures. Among the 2017 highlights of this important Schubert festival is a chamber concert bringing together three of the world's finest players, violinist Baiba Skride, cellist Sol Gabetta and pianist Nelson Goerner. Their programme features Schubert's Violin Sonata in A major D574, the Piano Trio in E, D929 and Chopin's Cello Sonata, Op 65

schubertiade.at, radio.orf.at

#### Astana Opera, Kazakhstan & medici.tv

### Plácido Domingo's Operalia competition final, July 29

Plácido Domingo's Operalia competition is a world opera competition open to singers of all voices aged between 18 and 32. This year's competition takes place at the impressive Astana Opera house in Kazakhstan - probably not a venue many readers will be familiar with - and you'll be able to watch the final live on medici.tv. Among the 40 hopefuls for 2017 is British countertenor Rupert Enticknap. The jury itself are an impressive line-up too. Presided over in a non-voting mediator

capacity by Domingo himself, they include the Metropolitan Opera's Artistic Administrator Jonathan Friend, the Royal Opera House's Director of Casting Peter Katona and Pål Christian Moe, casting consultant to Munich's Bavarian State Opera, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, France's Opéra de Lille and the Norwegian Opera House.

operaliacompetition.org, medici.tv

#### Cour du Château Louis XI, La Côte Saint-André & Radio Classique

### François-Xavier Roth directs a Shakespearean Berlioz programme, August 19

The Berlioz Festival takes place annually in Berlioz's birthplace of La Côte-Saint-André, about an hour south-east of Lyon. This year's festival runs from August 18 to September 3. Its theme is a bit of a mouthful: 'So British! Berlioz in London, in the era of Universal Exhibitions'. but it's also one that has produced some exciting programming with a heavy British involvement, with visits from Sir John Eliot Gardiner and the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique. Robert King and his King's Consort, and Nicholas Collon and Aurora Orchestra. One highlight this month includes François-Xavier Roth conducting the Jeune Orchestre Européen Hector Berlioz in a Shakespearian programme to include Berlioz's rarely heard grande ouverture to King Lear, and you can listen to it live through France's Radio Classique website.

festivalberlioz.com, radioclassique.fr















Vienna has always been one of the most beautiful cities in the world. It's stunning continental architecture, numerous parks, and world-renowned artsand cultural institutions have enchanted guests for centuries. Could there be a more suitable place for the company headquarters of The Joseph Brodmann Group?

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#### THE TECHNOLOGY THAT MAKES THE MOST OF YOUR MUSIC

THIS MONTH A new music storage solution, a purist amplifier with a novel approach, and how innovation is the way to keep hi-fi buyers interested Andrew Everard, Audio Editor

## From a tiny DAC to whole new speaker ranges

There's no shortage of novel products to keep the hi-fi enthusiast happy and the music flowing

einventing a popular speaker range is always a risky business but that's just what KEF has done with its all-new O Series 1, the eighth generation of one of the Kentbased company's most popular ranges. With models starting at £430 for the Q150 bookshelf/standmount model and going all the way up to the £1430/pr Q950, the new six-strong range features an enhanced version of the celebrated Uni-Q driver, which places the tweeter in the centre of the mid-range or mid/bass driver. New for this series is a damped Tweeter Loading Tube to the rear of the high-frequency driver, improving the lower treble, while a new low-distortion inductor in the crossover is designed for cleaner bass. The two bookshelf models - the Q150 and the £530/pr Q350 - use a single UniQ driver to cover the entire frequency range and the speakers are now rear-ported to reduce the audibility of mid-range leakage. The three floorstanders add dedicated mid-range and bass drivers, along with auxiliary bass radiators, the Q950 being joined by the £850/pr Q550 and £1150/pr Q750 in combining drivers with improved suspension for cleaner bass at high volume levels, plus a new paper cone for better



mid-range. With a seamless baffle and magnetic grilles to keep things tidy, the speakers are available in white or black.

From large speakers to smaller components. Audiolab has added a compact DAC to its range 2. Selling for just under £300, the M-DAC Mini is powered by a built-in rechargeable battery and has optical and coaxial digital inputs and outputs, as well as asynchronous USB Type A and Mini-B inputs, with two master clocks to avoid sample-rate conversion. There's also Bluetooth with aptX for wireless connectivity, and the new model uses the ES9018 Sabre32 Reference DAC, able to handle music at up to DSD 256. Outputs are provided on RCA phonos and a 6.3mm headphone socket.

From the same stable comes another reinvented speaker range in the form of the Wharfedale Diamond 11 **3**. Starting at just under £160/pr for the Diamond 11.0, the range includes three standmount models and three floorstanding designs, up to the 11.5 at £999.95/pr. The new in-house drive units include bass and mid-range drivers using massive magnets, ribbed baskets and advanced suspension for the woven Kevlar cones, while the tweeter uses a textile dome, an oversize ceramic magnet and its own rear enclosure. The crossovers have also been reworked, the slot-loading port has been redesigned for smoother airflow and the cabinets use a sandwich of woods of differing density to enhance damping. The speakers are available in black, white, rosewood and walnut finishes.

Finally this month, a Blu-ray player designed with music in mind. The Oppo UDP-205 4 not only plays SACDs and CDs along with video discs but can also act as a digital-to-analogue converter for a computer, using a pair of ESS Sabre ES9038PRO DACs. It can handle music streams up to DSD128 and has dedicated stereo analogue outputs for music listening plus separate power supplies for its digital and analogue sections. It sells for £1399. @



GRAMOPHONE AUGUST 2017 113 gramophone.co.uk



#### AUGUST TEST DISCS



With a superb sense of performance and a crisp hi-res transfer to bring out both the ethereal nature of the music and the drama, this set - conducted by the composer - is another fine LSO Live recording.



Recorded on a wonderful-sounding 1890 Érard piano, this second volume of Noriko Ogawa's Satie journey is quite beautiful whether in CD quality or 96kHz/24bit hi-res.

#### REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

## Naim Uniti Core

Designed to sit at the heart of a multiroom streaming audio system, the new Naim ripper/store/streamer also makes perfect sense as a stand-alone source

ome terms get overused when it around a new product launch. 'Long-awaited' is a good one, suggesting that whatever has just hit the shops is the subject of feverish anticipation and expectation, finally answering the question 'What did I ever do before ...?'

In the case of the new Naim Uniti range, however, that term has taken on a slightly unfortunate connotation. Announced last October as the replacement for the phenomenally successful original Uniti line-up, the four new models were due to hit the shops around the turn of the year, boasting a raft of new features and a thoroughly updated look and interface. Trouble is, despite a hugely expanded development team working on the new Uniti models - the Core server we have here and the Atom, Nova and Star player systems - Naim seems to have underestimated the task of bringing this new platform to market. At the time of writing in May 2017, only one model is on sale - the £1800 Uniti Core we have here – and the other three are now slated to appear in the coming months, although exact arrival dates remain somewhat hazy.

Fortunately, the Core is rather more of comes to building up the excitement a complete device than the UnitiServe it replaces, a sample of which has been running in my system almost since it was launched. Both fulfil the same basic functionality, in that they can rip music from CDs or store

> The Core is rather more than the UnitiServe it replaces ... just about everything has been changed here

files copied to them from a computer, as well as aggregating content from other network sources and serving it up to network players. The UnitiCore goes further: for a start it runs on the same platform as the other 'new Uniti' devices, enabling it to be controlled by the same Naim smartphone/ tablet app also used to 'drive' existing Uniti, Mu-so and Naim network players, whereas UnitiServe required a separate n-Serve app. And, as well as storing up to 100,000 tracks and serving up to 12 streams simultaneously at up to 384kHz/24 bit to Naim or other UPnP players, the Core can also be used directly into an offboard digital-to-analogue converter, or an amplifier with a built-in DAC, to create a simple playback system.



CD, CD-R/RW (ripping), slot-loading drive

#### File formats supported

WAV (to 384kHz/32 bit), AIFF/FLAC/ALAC (to 384kHz/24 bit), DSD64 and 128, MP3/ AAC (to 48kHz, 320kbps, 16 bit), OGG/ WMA (to 48kHz/16 bit)

Network streams Up to 12 simultaneous (192kHz/24 bit)

Connectivity Ethernet networking, two USB Type A, S/PDIF digital out (on BNC) Remote control via Naim app on Android/

iOS devices

Internal storage User-installed, HDD or SSD, up to 8TB

**Accessories supplied** Powerline Lite mains cable, hard drive mounting screws, BNC/phono adapter

Dimensions (WxHxD) 21.4x9.5x26.5cm naimaudio.com

Just about everything has been changed here, from the software used to rip CDs to the power supply design, and from the casework designed for improved thermal control to the Ethernet network implementation, designed for improved throughput and stability. Even the former model's external power supply 'brick' has been lost - the power supply is now

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## SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The Uniti Core's new flexibility opens up a range of system possibilities ...

#### **NAIM APP ON AN IPAD**

For the smoothest interface, control the Core – or indeed a complete multiroom system – with the Naim app on an iPad.



### NAIM 3COMPACT DAC-V1

The Core would work well with Naim's compact DAC-V1 to form a complete compact music playback system.



internal, with a standard IEC mains socket on the rear of the unit. Add in the Ethernet port, a USB Type A port (there's another on the front panel) and a BNC digital output (for which a phono adaptor is supplied), and that's the rear panel just about covered – well, apart from the two screws holding in place the hard-disk 'caddy', which is empty when the Uniti Core is delivered from the factory.

You see, rather than coming with a drive pre-installed, which can either be a limiting factor for some buyers or lead to a manufacturer having to offer a range of variants, the Naim is delivered without a drive, allowing the buyer to source and fit their own drive, or have the supplying retailer do so. Drives of up to 8TB can be accommodated, and the Core comes complete with screws to install either conventional hard drives or solid-state storage into the caddy, this being a very quick and simple job: with the drive bolted in place, inserting the holder back into place makes the connection to the internal circuitry.

The review sample came fitted with a conventional drive but if you really wanted you could run the Core without an internal drive. Then you'd use external USB or network storage either for content downloaded from online sources or ripped from CDs. However, given the relatively modest cost of the drive supplied with the review model – a 2TB Seagate ST2000VM003 Pipeline HD, which will set you back just over £70 – it would seem sensible to fit internal storage and at least use it for file importing and the like, even if the Naim isn't going to be the main music store in the system.

Ripping, by the way, is a simple matter of inserting the disc into the slot-loading drive and then just waiting for the Naim to eject it when done. The app lets you follow the progress of this process, built-in metadata look-up will tag music as it's copied to whichever storage you choose and it's also possible to use the Naim app to go in and edit data to suit your own tastes or requirements.

#### **PERFORMANCE**

With the rest of the 'new Uniti' range unavailable at the time of review, it was

difficult to assess the full flexibility of the Uniti Core but I was able to use it both as a server to feed other UPnP devices both Naim and other brands - and as a stand-alone transport for use with offboard DACs, both of which functions it fulfilled excellently. Set-up was simple with a few tweaks to my network configuration, principally to do with the way it 'saw' my usual NAS drives, but importing content from my existing UnitiServe was simple and smooth, and ripping content from CDs or transferring files using 'drag and drop' very easy. The control interface when the Core is used as a transport is simple and logical, making it easy to play music from its own storage or external devices. While there's endless fun to be had experimenting with the likes of mains cables, digital connections and supports – well, it is a Naim, after all! - the Core performs well with the standard Powerline Lite mains cable supplied and connected with a decent coaxial cable to a suitable DAC.

One has to be cautious when ascribing a 'sound' to a digital device such as this, whether network-connected or linked directly to a DAC, but the Naim sounds consistently clean, detailed and powerful, and shows benefits over a simple 'computer-to-DAC' connection, as one might hope given the price.

Across a wide range of music, the Core not only shows the potential of the new Uniti platform but also delivers a very enjoyable musical performance, whether with music ripped from CD which it handles efficiently, even finding cover artwork and booklet notes using a combination of Rovi, MusicBrainz and FreeDB lookups - or higher-definition content streamed to a suitable player. And, unlike the old UnitiServe, which had a somewhat clunky interface, the Core is simple to use as a player, making it a highly viable choice as a source for a digital music system, even if you don't need its extended networking capabilities.

In a way, this new functionality and improved interface will have the effect of moving Naim's little server from hidden away to a full system component – and, when its potential is realised in the rest of the new Uniti range, the results could be spectacular. **6** 

#### Or you could try ...

Of course, any network music system can be fed from a suitable NAS drive running UPnP software – all you have to do is plug the storage device into your home network and all manner of playback products can see it. But what devices such as the Uniti Core do is simplify the whole storage and filing process while also providing a smoother user-experience. That doesn't stop there being all kind of other 'audiophile' storage devices on the market, and perhaps the best-known – at least among enthusiasts – are the Melco models.

#### Melco N1AH60/2



The updated range, launched a few months back, now kicks off with the £2099 N1AH60/2, which comes complete with 6TB of storage built in and now features an improved interface for use straight into a DAC, this time using a USB interface as well as the previous networking capability. There's no built-in CD ripping but a USB drive can be added. For details, see **melco-audio.com**.

#### **Bluesound Vault 2**

A more affordable alternative is the Bluesound Vault 2, at around £1100, which combines CD ripping with 2TB storage and network capability. It is controlled using a dedicated app or a browser interface and offers both analogue and digital audio outputs for direct connection to an audio system. See **bluesound.com** for more information.

#### NAS QNAP HS-251+

Finally, you could still go down the



NAS route if you fancy a build-your-own network storage solution for your music. Some models these days offer the option of connecting an inexpensive USB CD/DVD drive for ripping and can even connect straight to a DAC for music playback. And some are even designed with use in the listening room in mind: the QNAP HS-251+, for example, is a silent-running model with no cooling fans, with prices starting from just over £300 without hard drives. More details at **qnap.com**.

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#### REVIEW MARANTZ PM-10

## Hefty integrated amp delivers sonic thrills

The looks may be deceptive: what initially seems like an ordinary amplifier, albeit on the grand scale, is actually something very special indeed

t first glance, the Marantz PM-10 looks rather ordinary. Yes, it may be hefty, and both solidly constructed and beautifully finished, but there doesn't seem to be much to set it apart from its manufacturer's other integrated amplifiers - well, apart from the 21.5kg weight and £6999 price tag, that is.

The PM-10 has been built as the companion to the £5999 SA-10 player/ converter reviewed in these pages in April, the two forming what the company is calling its 'New Reference' system. It's this positioning that explains the lack of digital inputs here: having built a player with not just a new transport mechanism dedicated to music playback but also its proprietary Marantz Musical Mastering system, the company decided to optimise its matching amplifier to just the one simple task – amplifying.

The PM-10 is designed to replace the company's previous reference system of pre-amplifier and monobloc power amplifiers. Doing so with an integrated amplifier might seem like a backwards step, as many feel a multi-box amplifier system offers technical advantages. However, what the designers have done here is retain the pre-amp and separate power amplifiers but put it all in one housing.

That's clear when the internal layout of the amplifier is examined but this isn't quite the usual arrangement of a compact pre-amplifier section flanked by a pair of massive power amplifiers. Instead, the power supply section is to the left when viewed from above, with separate supplies for the pre-amp and control section and one apiece for the power amp channels, and the pre-amplifier board to the right, immediately behind the inputs. Meanwhile, the power amplification is relatively compact and mounted centrally behind the speaker outputs in a little package with heatsinks either side of it. The Marantz makes use of high-efficiency Class D amplifier modules, using a pair for each channel in bridged mode.

Inputs are provided for moving coil and moving magnet phono cartridges, the phono stage being mounted in its own shielded case, and there are two sets of balanced inputs on XLR sockets and four line-ins, plus a direct power amplifier input



#### **MARANTZ PM-10**

Type Integrated amplifier

**Price** £6999

Inputs MM/MC phono, four line, two balanced, power amp direct

Outputs Two sets of speakers, 'record'

line out, headphones

Power output 200Wpc into 8 ohms, 400Wpc into 4 ohms

Tone controls No

**Accessories supplied** Remote handset

Finishes Black or gold

Dimensions (WxHxD) 44x16.8x45.3cm

marantz.co.uk

bypassing the volume control and input switching. There's also a fixed level line output. All the line inputs are converted to balanced working, which is how the amp operates throughout.

#### The Marantz majors on making music very easy to enjoy, each touch of finger on key crystal-clear

Speaker outputs are provided on solid copper terminals, with two sets per channel, and the amplifier is build on a dual-layer copper plated chassis and clad in aluminium panels including a solid fascia and a 5mm thick lid, all designed to be electrically inert while adding rigidity to the construction. Additionally, the output section and main power supplies are built on dual-layer copper printed circuit boards. It's also possible to combine multiple PM-10s into biamplification or multichannel systems, using what Marantz calls its Floating Control Bus System.

#### **PERFORMANCE**

The specification of the amp modules the Marantz uses suggests its 200W-perchannel rated output may be somewhat conservatively stated, and in use the

amplifier bears this out. It is effortlessly powerful, fast and dynamic but with massive warmth and generosity of presentation, and controls speakers with absolute grip. It may be as simple to use as the company's sub-£300 PM6006 but this is an amplifier demanding to be used with the very best partnering components, both sources and speakers, if it's to be heard at its best. I was fortunate enough to still have the SA-10 player to hand for some of the testing period and tried the PM-10 with this and both my usual PMC speakers and the Q Acoustics Concept 500s reviewed in June, as well as with my Naim NDS network player. Cabling was from the Chord Company and QED throughout.

The inescapable conclusion, at least after the Marantz has had a few hours to get warmed up and start doing its stuff, is that this is a very superior amplifier indeed – and more than a match for the kind of high-end pre-amplifier/power amplifier combinations against which it's pitched. It manages to be ruthlessly revealing of the source components with which it's fed but does so without any hint of the kind of forwardness or excessive brightness I know some find fatiguing in 'high end' audio systems. Instead the Marantz majors on making music very easy to enjoy, while still delivering excellent scale and weight with orchestral music allied to excellent insight and at the same time creating superbly three-dimensional sound stage pictures and having all the speed and definition required to make small-ensemble recordings thrilling. Even with solo instrumental recordings it manages to sound entirely remarkable: Noriko Ogawa's first two volumes of Satie on BIS, played on an 1890 Érard piano, sound both crisply defined and wonderfully atmospheric, with a lovely sense of the space around the instrument and each touch of finger on key crystal-clear.

Similarly, the recent Harmonia Mundi set of Pergolesi and Bach by La Nuova Musica under David Bates has that fine sense of focus allied to unforced spaciousness and freedom, the Marantz carrying that impression of warmth and fullness without ever becoming at all soft. It's simply a pleasure to listen to music played through this amplifier, provided source and speakers are up to the job. @

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#### ESSAY

## So hi-fi is a pastime of the past? Think again ...

Now established as the world's leading hi-fi show, Germany's High End event shows great sound has a future – and can be fun too

napshots from the annual Munich High End show, now that the dust has settled. A prominent high-end journalist announcing that he's all done with the year-opening CES in Las Vegas and that this was now the only must-see show; an earnest conversation about whether we old chaps are the last generation for whom hi-fi will be important; and a packed show proving that hi-fi still has the chance to reinvent itself out of being what one acquaintance called 'an old man's game'.

OK, so High End now attracts a vast range of 'professional' visitors - trade and press - from around the world, and has long since grown out of being an event for the domestic German market into a truly international one. But what's even more striking is that the demographic of the visiting public, paying their €12 a day to come and see products from hundreds of brands, many of which are well into 'dream system' pricing territory, is entirely different from what one would encounter at a show in the UK. And indeed in the States, as I heard one American visitor expressing his surprise that the audience in Munich wasn't just the 'old white men' he encounters at US show: instead there was a much greater age/gender mix, including couples, teenagers, children in buggies everyone, in fact. And though the gathered hi-fi industry at events like this does tend to get somewhat introspective, with stories of the 'good old days' when every student hotfooted to the local hi-fi shop clutching a first grant cheque, and how hi-fi has had its day as a must-have, the feeling of walking around the show is that the excitement is still there, and that there are products and ideas to attract people back and keep alive the enthusiasm that remains.

The sheer size of the high-end industry in Germany, and that it seems able not just to sustain itself but to continue to grow, clearly shows that enthusiasm for top-quality hi-fi is out there, even if some products do seem to be rather more about bling, such as the gold-plated speaker rotating silently on a plinth in the entrance to the show. But what Munich really seems to have is the ability to attract an audience with its new, exciting and unexpected products designed to capture



the imagination and have visitors dreaming of owning them.

Yes, there are still some of the old hi-fi show problems, even though this is a better set-up for demonstrations than most such events I could name. Not every company seems to have worked out how to get the best sound in the rooms available and too many are still playing very predictable and 'safe' demonstration music.

#### Munich has the ability to attract an audience with its new, exciting and unexpected products

There was little to stir the classical music enthusiast – too much 'vibes and drums' jazz and 'John Lewis Christmas ad' sloweddown plaintive female vocal/piano cover versions of rock classics, and I did hear The Eagles' 'Hotel California' rather too often for comfort. With a few honourable exceptions, the demonstrators need to up their game: I didn't come away from the show with a burning desire to buy any of the music I'd heard.

1 But the products were a different matter. Turning a corner I encountered the intriguing Mag-Lev floating turntable, which suspends the platter on an invisible magnetic cushion, isolating it from vibrations, motor noise and so on. It raises almost as many questions as it appears to answer, agreed, but there's no denying its attention-grabbing potential - and this is a very serious product, not a gimmick. Then there were two speaker companies both promising something unexpected; and while one proved to be some updated speakers with slightly confusing messages about how different they actually were from the models they replaced, the other was definitely different, in that it wasn't a speaker at all.

2 Britain's PMC is launching its own amplifier, despite already distributing two electronics brands. The £5000 Cor integrated borrows nothing from those ranges and is an all-analogue model of in-house design and manufacture, drawing on the company's studio

heritage with, for example, its tone and balance controls. These are operated using studio-grade faders, are remarkably subtle in their operation and, best of all, are motorised and can be controlled from the listening position using the remote handset. Now doesn't that intrigue anyone who's ever encountered a recording in need of a little tweak to make it more listenable?

3 Also raising a smile were the huge WM-4 speakers from Karl-Heinz Fink, the designer behind the Q Acoustics Concept 500 speakers reviewed in June. The Fink Team brand was making its show debut with one of the most professionally tuned and finest-looking rooms at the show, with the speakers in an eye-catching white zebra wood finish. That they were there at all was down to the stir they created in prototype form a year back, and I hear whispers that more models may be considered in the near future, so this could be a brand to watch.

4 Oh, and just to reinforce that theme of surprises around every corner, during the presentation for the Wharfedale Diamond 11 series speakers (see this month's Audio News page), my eyes wandered over to the large - very large -Quad speaker display. This, it seems, was the ESL 60 - well, it is 60 years since the ESL 57 - and I'm told the design on display was there merely to gauge the level of interest in a new electrostatic from Quad. Rather like those 'concept' designs the car manufacturers parade at motor shows, in fact. As the man from Quad owner IAG put it, 'There's been a lot - so now I guess we'll have to work out how to

That's the Munich effect – and why the show attracts both visitors and trade attendees in ever-growing numbers, which can only be good for the future of high-quality hi-fi. **G** 

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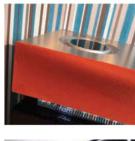
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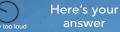
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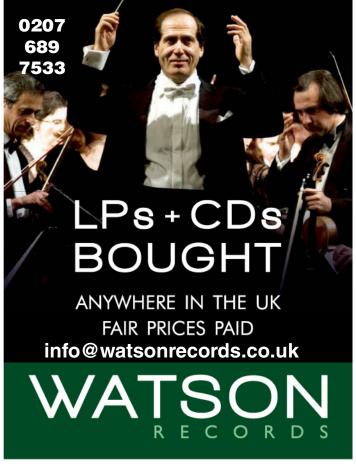






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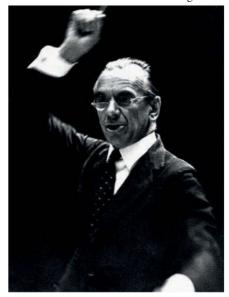
#### LPs: for better or for worse?

Peter Quantrill's article on recent vinyl releases (June, page 68) makes me wonder why those companies producing highquality 180gm records couldn't have made such an effort back in the 1970s and '80s when, frankly, the records foisted on a population with no other choice were of such poor quality that it's little wonder the new medium of CD was welcomed with open arms. I was only too delighted to ditch my burgeoning collection to start again with CD but I did keep a few for sentimental reasons. Listening to these relics again on top-quality equipment confirms what I think a lot of us knew at the time, that these records were not fit for purpose. Even full-price issues from the 'quality' labels were flimsy, insubstantial offerings.

Is this 'renaissance' proof, perhaps, that music lovers of yesteryear were ripped off? Robert Roy Edinburgh

#### Malcolm Sargent was a one-off

With reference to Andrew Achenbach's 'Icons' article (July, page 56), Sir Malcolm Sargent has always had a place in my collection, and his reputation, untainted by the fashions of taste and silliness of some critics, has never been diminished. Fifty years already! It only seems like yesterday that he made his brave appearance at the Last Night of the 1967 Proms. Within a few weeks he was gone.



Sir Malcolm Sargent: a fine British conductor

## Letter of the Month



Jiří Bělohlávek: a great loss to music, particularly to music of his homeland, the Czech Republic

### Remembering Jiří Bělohlávek

As I leafed through the July issue, I was shocked to read that Jiří Bělohlávek had died. Looking back, what wonderful concerts he gave us – performances of Czech operas, a great Mahler Third and many more including one, in 2001, with our National Youth Orchestra in which he conducted Dvořák's Cello Concerto and Suk's *Asrael* Symphony.

I was lucky to go to two concerts he gave in Prague with the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra. The first, in 2004, was of Dvořák's *St Ludmila*, the first time I'd heard this work, and very much enjoyed it. The second was in 2014 and included Smetana's *Má* vlast – it was one of the opening concerts of that year's Spring Festival and was a wonderful performance. Both concerts were in the lovely Smetana Hall.

I wonder if Maestro Bělohlávek will be remembered in the lovely cemetery by the Peter and Paul Church in Vyšehrad near Prague, along with all those other Czech musicians, composers and artists? I hope so. David Smith Rochester, Kent

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I daresay that modern conductors produce more exciting performances, in a superficial way. But our current stick-waggers always seem to be flying here and there, never achieving a solid base from which to operate and create a style, unlike conductors such as Ansermet, Beecham, Toscanini and others. Sargent was a busy person but he always gave time to children (he'd lost his daughter). He also made frequent radio appearances, including the wartime

Brains Trust Series where he would mix with academics of a high calibre. Sadly we have no such personalities as Sargent and Beecham these days. He was a great British conductor.

Cliff Millward Tipton, West Midlands

#### Editorial comment

Oberto was Verdi's first opera (1839) and not his second (as per our June review), which was in fact *Un giorno di regno* (1840).

## **OBITUARIES**

An inspiring British conductor and pianist; a popular British tenor

#### SIR JEFFREY TATE

Conductor and pianist Born April 28, 1943 Died June 2, 2017



The pianist and conductor Jeffrey Tate has died; he was 74. He overcame the physical disabilities of spina bifida and kyphosis to rise to the top of his profession.

A doctor by training (at Cambridge and then at St Thomas's Hospital in London), Tate abandoned medicine to train at the London Opera Centre, joining the staff of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, as a repetiteur where he worked with Sir Georg Solti (he'd later assist and play the continuo on Solti's recordings, most notably the classic Decca set of Le nozze di Figaro). He also worked with Pierre Boulez (assisting on his Bayreuth Ring as well as the premiere of Friedrich Cerha's completion of Alban Berg's Lulu). He also worked with Herbert von Karajan at Salzburg and with James Levine at the Met, stepping in at three hours' notice in 1980 to conduct Lulu (he'd return to the New York house for six seasons to conduct primarily Mozart and Richard Strauss). He also worked privately with Maria Callas at the end of her career.

In 1985 he was appointed the first Principal Conductor of the English Chamber Orchestra and began a major recording programme for EMI which included the complete Mozart symphonies as well as a number of Haydn's. He conducted the premiere recording of Mahler's orchestration of Schubert's Death and the Maiden Quartet. Of one of his Mozart symphony discs, Edward Greenfield wrote in May 1985: 'Daniel Barenboim made a fine Mozart symphony series with the ECO, but with less extreme speeds and more refined playing Tate is now outshining even that achievement in performances ideal for those who resist period instruments, yet want freshness and clear textures on the one hand, warmth and sparkle on the other.' Tate and the ECO would also partner Mitsuko Uchida on a complete Mozart piano concertos cycle for Philips. Opera recordings included Humperdinck's Hänsel und Gretel and Berg's Lulu (EMI), Offenbach's Les contes d'Hoffmann (Philips), Richard Strauss's Arabella (Decca) and

Elektra (Claves), and Rolf Liebermann's La forêt (Musiques Suisses).

He was a sympathetic partner on the podium and supported numerous singers on disc including Kiri Te Kanawa, Renée Fleming and Agnes Baltsa, plus instrumentalists such as Nigel Kennedy (Bruch/Mendelssohn), Frank Peter Zimmermann (Bach and Beethoven) and Pieter Wispelwey (Walton). He also played the piano for Ian Bostridge's Noël Coward recording and displayed a delightful feel for the idiom.

Other orchestral and operatic posts included Principal Conductor of the Royal Opera (1986-91), Principal Conductor of the Rotterdam PO (1991-95), Music Director of Naples's San Carlo Theatre (2005-10), and, at his death, he was Chief Conductor of the Hamburg SO (a post he took up in 2009).

He was made a Knight Bachelor in the 2017 New Year's Honours for services to British music abroad.

#### JOHN BRECKNOCK

Tenor Born November 29, 1937 Died May 30, 2017



John Brecknock, best known for his roles in ENO productions, has died aged 79. John Steane described Brecknock in these pages as 'one of the best English

tenors of the post-war period' (12/89).

Brecknock played Werther in Massenet's opera opposite Dame Janet Baker as Charlotte, leading Patrick O'Connor (in his review of Chandos's live CD issue) to say that 'in the great confrontations with Charlotte in the last two scenes, [Brecknock] rises to a performance of passion and strength that equals Baker's' (7/00).

Another key role was that of Alfredo in *La traviata*. Once he was singing it with a leading lady who refused to be embraced: 'Fortunately she had a long train on her dress, and when she started to move away I put my foot on it,' he recalled. Other role highlights included Anatol in the first stage performance of Prokofiev's *War and Peace* in 1972; Don Ottavio alongside Sutherland in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* at the Met (1978); and singing in *Trial by Jury* at the 1982 Proms.

## NEXT MONTH SEPTEMBER 2017



### Being Barbara Hannigan

The leading exponent of contemporary opera speaks to Neil Fisher about her first recording as both soprano and conductor

## Celebrating Elliott Carter

Ahead of a new release of the late American composer's music, Jed Distler talks to some major interpreters about the evolution of Carter's style

### Schwarz at 70

The conductor takes stock of his vast recorded legacy with Andrew Farach-Colton as he curates his own 70th-birthday, 30-disc retrospective for Naxos

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## NEW RELEASES INDEX

The latest releases on CD, SACD, DVD, Blu-ray and download

Key: 🖲 Full price £10 and over 🔞 Medium price £7.76 - £999 🕲 Budget price £6.25 - £775 🕲 Super-budget price up to £6.24 😯 Reissue 🛈 Historic 🕮 SACD 🙅 DVD 😂 Blu-ray 🔿 LP

|   | BR-KLASSIK br-online.de  | CPO jpc.de/jpcng/cpo/home   |
|---|--|---|
| CD & SACD   | Beethoven Sym No 9 (pp2007). Sols/Bavarian Rad Sym Chor &          | Andriessen, H Sym Wks, Vol 4. Netherlands SO/Porcelijn.   |
| <u> </u>  | Orch/Jansons.  | © CPO777 845-2  |
| ACCENTUS  | Handel Occasional Oratorio (pp2017). Sols/AAM Berlin/Arman.        | Beal. Calandrelli. Freiberg Symphonic Jazz. Miles, A/WDR  |
| Beethoven Cpte Syms (pp2014-17). Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch/   | (F) ② 900520   | Funkhaus Orch, Cologne/Marshall/Baumann. (F) CPO555 154-2                                       |
| Biomstedt. © ACC80322   | Mahler Sym No 5 (pp2016). Bavarian RSO/Jansons. 🕞 900150           | Bonno. Gassmann. Monn. Wagenseil Fl Concs. Ens  |
| ALBA albafi   |  | Klingekunst/Grössinger. © CPO555 076-2  |
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| Beethoven Pf Sons Nos 21, 23 & 26. Pashchenko. © ALPHA365   | All-Stars. © CA21133   | © CPO777 796-2  |
| Buxtehude Trio Sons, Op 1. Arcangelo/Cohen. © ALPHA367  | CAPRICCIO capriccio.at   | Hausegger Orch Wks. Bamberg SO/Hermus. © CPO777 810-2   |
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| Beethoven Stg Qts, Opp 95 & 131. Auvergne Orch/Veses.   | Vaughan Williams Orch Wks. Rummel/Deutsche Staatsphilh,            | Michael Musicalische Seelen-Lust - Sacred Madrigals. Weser-                                     |
| (F) AP152   | Rhineland-Palatinate/Steffens. © C5314                             | Renaissance/Cordes. © CPO777 935-2  |
| <b>Geminiani</b> Art of Playing on the Vn. <i>Von der Goltz.</i> © <b>AP134</b>                     | Various Cpsrs Jubilee Edn. Shirai. © C5324                         | Mozart Cpte Masonic Wks. Kobow/Kiener/Steffens/Salzburg   |
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| Various Cpsrs Exiles. Gaillard/Sirba Octet/Monte Carlo PO/ Judd.   © ② ◆ APLP142                    | CARUS carus-verlag.com   | Nowowiejski Quo vadis. Sols/Podlasie Op & Philh Ch/   |
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| Martinů. Milhaud Cpte Wks for Stg Trio. Jacques Thibaud   |  | Vivaldi Four Seasons (Dresden version). Arte dell'Arco/   |
| Stg Trio. © AUDITE97 727  | CHAMPS HILL champshillrecords.co.uk                                | Guglielmo.  |
| BIS bis.se  | Brahms Pf Pieces, Op 76. 'Schumann' Vars Schumann Carnaval.        | CRYSTAL RECORDS crystalrecords.com  |
| Bach, JS Secular Cantatas, Vol 8. Sols/Bach Collegium Japan/  | Tarasova.   © CHRCD126   | Various Cpsrs Augmented. Westwood Wind Qnt/Reneau/Robe/   |
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MDR Rad Chor/Joost. ® NI5964 ♠ ② HCD32784/5 **(F) GFN17476** Bach, JS Art of Fugue. Karosi. (F) NI5943 Bloch Wks for Vc & Pf. Wallfisch/York. Scarlatti, D Ten Hundred Devils - Kybd Sons. Braunschweiler. HYPERION hyperion-records couk oehmsclassics.de OFHMS (F) GFN17477 Feldman For Bunita Marcus. Hamelin. (F) CDA68048 Beethoven. Wagner Op Arias & Scenes. Strid/Bulgarian Various Cpsrs Heavy - Contemporary Wks for Solo Vn. Zádory. Potter Pf Concs Nos 2 & 4. Shelley/Tasmanian SO. © CDA68151 (F) OC1882 Nat RSO/Anguelov. F GEN17473 Sheppard Media vita - Sacred Wks. Westminster Cath Ch/Baker. Bruckner Cpte Syms. Salzburg Mozarteum Orch/Bolton. (F) CDA68187 (S) (9) (D) OCO31 GLOSSA alossamusic.com Lehár Graf von Luxemburg. Sols incl Behle/Frankfurt Op & Strauss, R Cpte Songs, Vol 8. Spence, N/Evans, R/Vignoles. Museum Orch/Kim. ® 2 OC968 Bach, JS Wks for FI & Hpd. Hazelzet/Ogg. (B) (2) GCDC80804 (F) CDA68185 © OC1857 Mozart Pf Sons, Vol 5, Youn. Wert Madrigals, Venexiana/Cavina, KLANGLOGO klanglogo de Mussorgsky Night on the Bare Mountain. Songs & Dances of Various Costs Al alva venid: Secular Wks from the Spanish Handel Neun deutsche Arien. Spengler/Ens Contrapunct\_us/ Death Prokofiev Alexander Nevsky. Sulimsky/Kulaeva/ Renaissance. Ens La Romanesca/Moreno. M G GCDC80203 F KL1520 Gürzenich Orch, Cologne/Kitaenko. (F) OC459 Various Cosrs Istampite. Sinfonve/Wishart. M G GCDC80701 (F) OC1871 Schubert. Liszt Pf Wks. Asuka. LINN linnrecords.com Various Cpsrs Nuevo mondo: 17th-Century Wks in Latin Wagner Ring ohne Worte. Staatskapelle Weimar/Albrecht, H. Various Cpsrs Super Audio Collection, Vol 10. Various artists. America. Ens Elvma/Garrido. M G GCDC80022 (F) OC1872 ® . AKP564 Various Cpsrs Responde mihi. Cappella Neapolitana/Florio. Various Cpsrs Lieder im Volkston. Mühlemann/Damerau/ lvrita.co.uk F) OC1875 M G GCDC80023 Schweiger/Nazmi/Baianu. Hurd Chor Wks, Vol 1. Vasari Sgrs/Backhouse. 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| Nat Orch.  © PTC5186 593  Bartók Conc for Orch. Music for Stgs, Perc & Celesta (r1974).  Boston SO/Kubelik/Ozawa. © PTC5186 247  Mahler Song-Cycles. Coote/Netherlands PO/Albrecht, M. © PTC5186 576  PRAGA DIGITALS  Bartók Duke Bluebeard's Castle. Cantata profana (r1953).  New SO/Süsskind. © PRD250 349  Roussel Orch Wks (r1949-63). Various artists. © DSD350 138  Tchaikovsky Pf Concs Nos 1 & 2. Theme & Vars (pp1950-59).  Gilels. © PRD250 388  PROFIL  Bruckner Collection. Various artists. © Q PR16059  Bruckner Sym No 4. Philh Festiva/Schaller. © PH3049  Various Cpsrs Art of (r1945-58). Rodzinski. Various Cpsrs Art of (r1949-59). Vito.  SEATTLE SYMPHONY MEDIA recording Ives Three Places in New England. Orch Set Holidays (pp2016-17). Seattle SO/Morlot.  SHEVA COLLECTION  Lampis D'improvviso - Meditazioni for Gtr. L. Various Cpsrs Aqua - Pf Wks. Arnicane. Various Cpsrs Aqua - Pf Wks. Arnicane. Various Cpsrs Aqua - Pf Wks. Arnicane. Various Cpsrs Italian Rococo at the Hermita Genewein.  SOMM  Castelnuovo-Tedesco Pf Wks. Bebbington. Elgar Elgar & His Peers. London Sym Concert  | ® ② RES10192 //Hart/RSNO/   |
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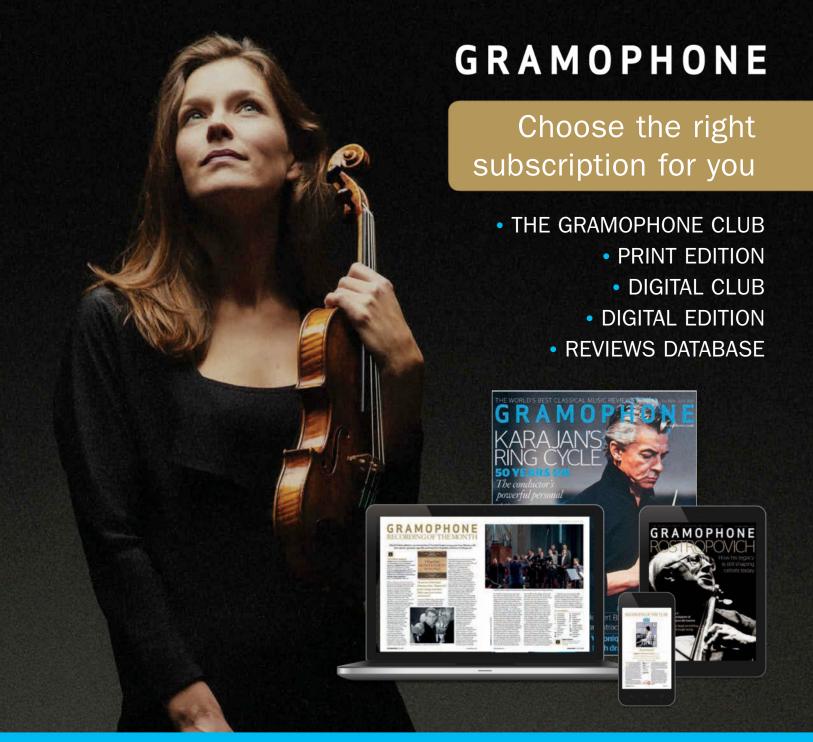
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Chris Beardshaw

The plantsman, designer and broadcaster on why plants love music, and how Bach inspired his creation at this year's Chelsea Flower Show

**My musical background** is as desert-like as you can imagine. My music teacher at secondary school singlehandedly destroyed any interest I had in classical music. My sole recollection is listening repeatedly to an old recording of *Peter and the Wolf*.

Once I started to design in my early twenties, I began to realise the emotional triggers that can be played out in a landscape; as I was discovering the emotional connection with external space, I started to listen to a broader spectrum of music. I would use music to open the mind and, in that dreamlike state, design solutions would appear. One of the first pieces I came across was Vaughan Williams's Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis – its flow, pattern and geometry are easy to mimic when you're creating a garden.

**Then I came** across Debussy's *Clair de lune*, which captures light and shade perfectly. When I listen to a piece of music, I can't interpret it technically but I *can* experience it in colours and pictures. Listening to Beethoven, which has a sense of power and drama on an overwhelming scale, I can visualise landscape, seascape, clouds blowing across moors ... It's an added dimension of expression, which I find useful.

For a long time I'd been perplexed by the fact that the languages of horticulture and music – 'tone', 'pattern' and 'rhythm' – seem to overlap. And, of course, we know that plants are stimulated by the vibrations in music – they are more resilient and produce more flowers. So I began to wonder if there could be a relationship between the design of an external space and the way in which a composer puts notes on the page. When I designed the Morgan Stanley Garden for the RHS Chelsea Flower Show this year, and worked with the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain to create a piece of music inspired by the garden's design, it was an experiment. I didn't have any idea how it would manifest itself.

I spent time with NYO composer Lauren Marshall and her tutor; together, we explored the mechanics of creating a garden space and how those might in turn be converted into music. There was a definite collaborative process, graphically speaking – we were both using pencil and paper, and I think this underlined the link between our methods.

**Two other pieces** of music were also crucial to the process: the *Adagio* from Bach's Concerto in D minor, BWV974, which inspired the woodland end of the garden, and the *Allegro* from Mozart's Violin Sonata in F, K376, which inspired the terrace end. I had been exploring fractal geometry – the unconnected patterns, found not just in nature but also in music and art, which share common characteristics – and discovered that both these composers had been analysed in this way. I would listen to these pieces and allow the pencil to move so that





#### THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT

**Tchaikovsky** The Nutcracker - Waltz of the Flowers Mariinsky Orchestra / Gergiev Mariinsky (12/16) My two youngest daughters are finding their personal expression through dance, and it's a joy to see them perform, uninhibited, to this music.

there were shapes and lines across the texture of the cartridge paper. In other words, I was drawing what I heard.

The Bach movement is very opulent and verdant, and for me that conjured woodlands. I wanted to use green plants with textures that represented the subtleties of the music, and an open-air canopy to reflect the sparkling elements. The Mozart, by contrast, is full of pomp and ceremony, and is also chaotic, so we went for maximum intensity, colour-wise, and strong vertical accents to capture the theatricality of the piece.

You can't predict the personality of a garden – sometimes it clicks, sometimes it doesn't. But this one was stunning. The garden interpreted the Mozart and Bach elements, and Lauren's extraordinary music filled the Loggia. She managed to create a piece that told the narrative of a garden, and it was wonderful to be told by the public how well we'd achieved a horticultural representation of the music. When I stood there, listening to the 10 members of the orchestra playing in a garden inspired by music, which was in turn having that music played back to it, it was an unforgettable experience. Ger information on NYO concerts and courses, visit nyo.org.uk; for information on Chris Beardshaw's projects, visit chrisbeardshaw.com

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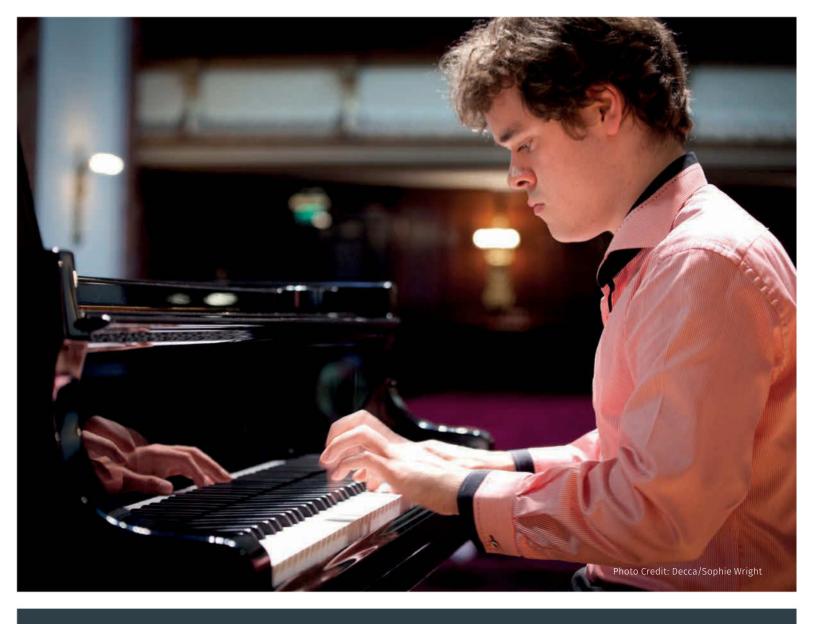


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